

This is a collection of the writings of Adil Salahi that appeared in *ArabNews* between 21 July 2003 and 30 May 2005.

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Uthman: A Model Islamic Ruler

Author:

Adil Salahi

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When Uthman ibn Affan was chosen as the third Caliph, after the six-man committee appointed by Umar for the task of choosing the Caliph completed its work, he proved himself worthy of the post which was fast becoming the most powerful in the world. Justice Abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi, who has verified the attitudes adopted by the Prophet's companions in the period that followed his death and in subsequent developments, states that "Uthman lived up to all expectations. He never breached anything the Prophet had enjoined. Nor did he ever violate a commitment, perpetrate anything reprehensible or go against the Prophet's Sunnah. Indeed the Prophet had foretold that Umar would die a martyr, as would Uthman. And he further added that Uthman would be a martyr and that he was certain to be in heaven, but that he would have to first endure some personal trouble. He and his wife, Ruqayyah, the Prophet's daughter, were the first people to undertake the trouble of immigrating from their hometown to serve God's cause after Abraham, the prophet. This fact has qualified him to have a special entry in books that mention the pioneers in different areas."

Muhibb Al-Deen Al-Khateeb comments that Uthman was always expected to be exemplary in his behavior as a ruler, because the Prophet, who received revelations from on high, testified to his integrity and that he would end his life well. Al-Khateeb quotes Ibn Hajar, a reputable scholar of Hadith who wrote a voluminous commentary on Al-Bukhari's Sahih: "Many are the reports that

quote the Prophet assuring Uthman of admission into heaven, and giving him the honor of martyrs. None tries to twist the Hadith giving Uthman such assurance other than a person who is happy to plunge himself into hell.” Moreover, Al-Tirmidhi reports a Hadith on the authority of Talhah quoting the Prophet as saying: “Every prophet has a companion, and my companion in heaven is Uthman.” In another Hadith the Prophet says: “I have prayed to God that He would not let into hell anyone who has married into my family, or one into whose family I have married.” The Prophet gave Uthman a further testimony which both Abu Bakr and Umar would have dearly loved to have. Muslim relates on Aishah’s authority that the Prophet said: “Should I not cover my embarrassment in the presence of a man in whose presence even angels feel embarrassed?”

Numerous are the reports Al-Khateeb adds, quoting many of the Prophet’s companions and their successors testifying to Uthman’s high standing. Abdullah ibn Umar, a distinguished scholar among the Prophet’s companions, says: “During the Prophet’s time, we never rated anyone higher than Abu Bakr, then Umar, then Uthman. We then looked at the rest of the Prophet’s companions in the same light, giving none any preference over the others.” (Related by Al-Bukhari). Al-Muhallab ibn Abi Sufrah was asked: “Why was Uthman given the title Dhu Al-Noorayn (which means ‘the man with two lights’)?” He answered: “Because we do not know of anyone else in history who married two daughters of any prophet.”

Al-Nazzal ibn Sabirah, a scholar who learned directly from Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali and taught many scholars of the tabieen generation, reports: “We requested Ali to tell us about Uthman and he said: ‘He is the man known among the Supreme Society of the angels as Dhu Al-Noorayn.’” Furthermore, when Uthman was elected as Caliph, Abdullah ibn Masood, a scholar among the Prophet’s companions, said: “We have spared no effort in choosing the best man among us.” After Uthman’s death, Ali described him in the following words: “Uthman was the best of us in extending kindness to relatives. He was one of those who have truly attained to faith, feared God and was keen to do every good thing. These are the ones whom God loves.”

Abullah ibn Umar is quoted by his son, Salim, as saying: “They have taken against Uthman things which none would have found fault with, had they been done by Umar.” This statement is highly significant, because it is the statement of a learned companion of the Prophet who was present throughout Uthman’s reign and was most meticulous in following the Prophet’s Sunnah. He is stating here that everything that people held against Uthman could have been done by Umar, his own father, and would have raised no objection. Another report mentions that Abdullah ibn Umar was asked about Uthman and Ali. He said to his questioner: “How can you ask me about two men each of whom is better than me, and you want me to praise one in preference to the other?”

As mentioned earlier, the Prophet foretold that Uthman would be a martyr and that he would be among those who were certain to be in heaven, but that he would have to first endure some personal trouble. This refers to an authentic Hadith related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash’ari which mentions that “the Prophet entered an orchard and told me to watch at the door. A man sought permission to enter, and the Prophet told me: ‘Admit him and tell him that he is certain to be in heaven.’ The man was Abu Bakr. Another person sought permission to enter, and the Prophet said to me: ‘Let him in and tell him that he will be in heaven.’ It was Umar. A third person

then came and requested entry. The Prophet was silent for a short while before saying to me: ‘Admit him and tell him that he will be in heaven but he will encounter some trouble in life.’ The man was Uthman ibn Affan.”

This is a clear reference by the Prophet to the fact that those who rebelled against Uthman were definitely in the wrong. Had he been the one who was wrong, he would not earn martyrdom when they killed him. The Prophet made it clear that Uthman would be a martyr, as he indeed was when he was unjustly killed. The Prophet also describes the conflict that led to Uthman’s killing as trouble that was clear to earn Uthman the martyrdom that every Muslim would dearly love to earn.

Furthermore, the Prophet indicated that the trouble would lead to the unjust killing of Uthman. A Hadith related by Ibn Majah quotes Kaab ibn Ajrah, a companion of the Prophet, as saying: “The Prophet mentioned some future trouble which was to come in the near future. A man covering himself with a hood passed by and the Prophet said: ‘This man will be properly guided on that day.’ I rushed to him and held him by his shoulders to find out that he was Uthman. I turned to the Prophet and said: ‘Is he the one?’ The Prophet confirmed that he was.”

We also learn from Ibn Al-Arabi that Uthman was the first man ever to migrate for God’s sake since Abraham, the distinguished Prophet.

This is a reference to the immigration by a number of the Prophet’s companions to Abyssinia in the early days of Islam. The Prophet suggested that some of his companions should settle there, as the country was ruled by a king distinguished for justice. Uthman was the first to take up the Prophet’s suggestion, and he traveled with his wife, Ruqaiyyah, the Prophet’s daughter. They came back later when the Prophet himself migrated to Madinah. This is certainly a distinction that Uthman had earned.

Arab News *Islam* 21 July 2003



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Uthman: The Victim Of A Wrongful Assassination

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Summarizing the events at the end of Uthman's reign, Justice Abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi says: "After he had exercised power in a proper manner, he was unjustly killed so that God would accomplish His purpose. He neither set out to fight, nor raised an army, nor stirred strife. He did not call upon the Muslim community to pledge their loyalty to him. Indeed, none of his peers fought against him or sought to replace him. It is unanimously agreed that no one may do that against a much lesser ruler than Uthman, let alone stand against Uthman, the Prophet's companion (may God be pleased with him).

"Reports mention the names of those who rose against Uthman. When we examine the list we find that it includes only people who had their wicked purposes foiled. They were reprimanded time and again. They stayed for a while (in Hums) where Abd Al-Rahman ibn Khalid ibn Al-Waleed warned them of severe punishment. As a result, they declared their repentance, whereupon he sent them to Uthman where again they declared that they were no longer hostile to him.

Uthman offered them a choice and they chose to travel to different provinces. When each group of them went to the land of their choice, they began to instigate rebellion against him and came back in force. He was in his garden when he spoke to them, reminding them that they should fear God and refrain from shedding his blood. Talhah ibn Ubaydellah came out with tears in his eyes warning people against committing a very grave crime. Ali sent his two sons (to keep guard at the Caliph's place). The rebels said to them: 'You have sent to us to come here to support you against the one who has changed course. When we came in response to your call, this man (meaning Ali) sits in his home, while you come out with your eyes swelling with tears. By God, we will not return until we have shed his blood.'

"This was certainly an attitude of grave injustice, fabricating lies against the Prophet's companions and stating these lies to their faces. Had Uthman wished, he would have asked the Prophet's companions for support and they would have immediately come to his aid. Those rebels adopted an attitude of one seeking the removal of injustice, but Uthman warned them, and they were furious. The Prophet's companions wanted to stop them by force, but Uthman made it clear to them that none should fight on his account. He thus gave himself up, and the Prophet's companions let him have his choice. This is an important question of Fiqh: Is it open to a man to give himself up, or must he defend himself? If he gives himself up and forbids others to defend him by shedding blood, is it permissible for such others to defend him against his wish? Scholars have different views on this. In short, Uthman committed no offence at any time in his reign. Nor did the Prophet's companions. People should ignore any false report they may hear on these events."

This is a very concise report of the serious events leading to the assassination of Uthman, the third Caliph who was dearly loved by the Prophet and the overwhelming majority of his companions. As usual, Muhibb Al-Deen Al-Khateeb adds extensive footnotes to explain what Ibn Al-Arabi had written several centuries earlier. As we have seen, Ibn Al-Arabi begins his account by saying that Uthman was unjustly killed. Al-Khateeb quotes here a Hadith related by Ahmad on the authority of Abdullah ibn Umar: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentioned some future trouble, and as he spoke a man passed by. The Prophet added: 'This hooded man will be wrongfully killed then.' I looked up and saw the man to be Uthman ibn Affan." This Hadith has been verified by the scholar Ahmad Shakir to be certainly authentic.

Explaining Ibn Al-Arabi's words, Al-Khateeb clarifies that Uthman never contemplated a fight against fellow Muslims. As for fighting unbelievers to ensure the spread of Islam, his reign witnessed greatly successful activities on several fronts. He never sought power for himself. In fact, he was chosen by the Muslim community without ever aspiring to be in the position of Caliph.

Al-Khateeb also endorses the statement that "none of (Uthman's) peers fought against him or sought to replace him." He explains that his peers were those nominated by Umar as candidates to succeed him. As for the crowds raised by Abdullah ibn Saba' (the mastermind of the rebellion against Uthman), those were of a level far below such candidates. By their blind following of Ibn Saba', they caused much evil. Sufficient to say here that the jihad movement that started in Abu Bakr's time came to a very long halt as a result. Imam Ibn Taimiyah says: "None of the good Muslims shared in anyway in Uthman's killing, by word or deed. Those who took part in his murder were some of the worst people. Indeed, Ali ibn Abi Talib used to pray: 'My Lord! Let Your curse overwhelm Uthman's killers in land and sea, in the plains and on mountains'."

Al-Khateeb also mentions that those people were repeatedly warned against rising in rebellion. They were first warned by a number of scholars in their own provinces, like Kufah, Basrah and Egypt. They were also strongly warned by Muawiyah, the governor of Syria, after Uthman had sent them there. Abd Al-Rahman ibn Khalid, who was the governor of Hums and surrounding areas, arrested them and warned them severely, and they pretended to him that they had taken heed. He then gave them the choice of traveling to see the Caliph, and one of their leaders, Al-Ashtar Al-Nukha'ie, took up that offer, which we will discuss in more detail later. But when they arrived in Madinah they took a hostile attitude. Hence, the Caliph warned them that they would put themselves in very serious trouble if they were to kill him.

Yet those rebels found in Madinah a situation totally unlike what they expected. They found the great figures among the Prophet's companions supporting Uthman. Ali sent his two sons to guard him in his home, and Talhah spoke to them passionately, with tears in his eyes. They expressed their surprise telling Talhah that they had received from him and others letters calling on them to come over and stop the Caliph who had adopted a course different to that of the Prophet. Yet Talhah and other companions of the Prophet never wrote such letters, but apparently letters of the sort were forged by Abdullah ibn Saba' and his fellow conspirators to persuade ordinary people that by joining the rebellion, they would be putting the Muslim state back on the course followed by the Prophet and his first two successors.

Indeed, many of the Prophet's companions tried to persuade Uthman to stand up to those rebels. Muawiyah suggested to him to move his capital to Syria, or that he should send him a powerful army to defend Madinah against any rebellion. Uthman, however, refused all these offers, holding the rebels to their claims that they came up with complaints. He felt that if the complaint was genuine, then he should explain his case. But they did not listen to him. On the contrary, they were determined to kill him. Therefore, he felt that he would spare the Muslim community further bloodshed by sacrificing his own life. He ordered all those who came to guard his home to leave and stay in their own homes, so that no more trouble should develop. He thought that by sacrificing his own life, he would let the trouble subside. We will have more to say on this in future articles.



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False Accusations Against Uthman

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Edited by Adil Salahi

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The opponents of Uthman who took part in the rebellion that led to his wrongful assassination had a long list of false accusations against him. These are refuted by Justice Ibn Al-Arabi in a direct, brief and powerful manner. His method of approach is to state first all the argument given against the Caliph before refuting it point by point. Thus he says:

“Following the reports made by clear liars, they unjustly claimed that Uthman perpetrated a number of unjust actions and things that could not be condoned. These include:

1. He had Ammar beaten so badly that his bowels were left open;
2. He beat up Abdullah ibn Massoud and broke his ribs, and denied him his allowance;
3. He perpetrated a deviation from the Sunnah when he collated copies of the Qur'an and burned the rest;
4. He made certain land a protectorate;

5. He exiled Abu Dharr to Rabidhah;
6. He sent Abu Al-Dardaa' out of Syria into exile;
7. He allowed Al-Hakam back into Madinah when it was the Prophet who expelled him;
8. He stopped the Sunnah of shortening prayers during travel;
9. He appointed people like Muawiyah, Abdullah ibn Amir and Marwan as governors; as he did with Al-Waleed ibn Uqbah who was a transgressor, unfit for such a post;
10. He gave Marwan one-fifth of Afriqia;
11. While Umar used his whip, Uthman used a stick to beat people;
12. He mounted a step up on the pulpit to be at the level used by the Prophet while Abu Bakr and Umar moved a step down;
13. He did not take part in the Battle of Badr, and fled during the Battle of Uhud, and was absent on the day when the Prophet's companions made the pledge under the tree, known as Bay'at Al-Ridwan;
14. He refused to put Ubaydellah ibn Umar to death for killing Al-Hurmuzan (who had given Abu Lu'lu'ah a knife to kill Umar); and
15. He sent a letter to Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh with a slave of his, riding his own camel, asking him to kill all those mentioned in the letter.

Such were the indictments against Uthman as summarized by Ibn Al-Arabi. He now goes on to refute every item in this long list. He says: "This is all false, both in form and substance. Their claim that Uthman perpetrated 'unjust actions and things that could not be condoned' is absolutely false. The whole report that he beat up Abdullah ibn Massoud and denied him his allowance is false, as is the report that he beat up Ammar badly. Had it been true that he left his bowels open, he would not have survived at all. Some scholars have tried to justify that in certain ways, but it is futile to carry on with this, because the whole report is false. No right thing can be based on what is false. We should know better than to waste our time over what some ignorant people might say, for it is futile and has no end."

We note here that Ibn Al-Arabi does not engage in any detailed discussion of the first two accusations against Uthman, except to assert that they are both false, and to point out that had the first one been true, Ammar would not have survived. Muhibb Al-Deen Al-Khateeb explains the sort of relations that existed between Uthman and these two highly-respected companions of the Prophet. He quotes Ibn Massoud's statement concerning the choice of Uthman as the third Caliph, as he said: "We have chosen the best one among us, sparing no effort in our choice."

At the time when Uthman was chosen, Ibn Massoud was in charge of finance in the Kufah province, while Saad ibn Abi Waqqas was in charge of prayer and defense. Both were appointed by Umar. However, disagreement between the two crept up over a question of a loan taken by Saad (which we will discuss in detail later), and Uthman sacked Saad as a result. Up till then, relations between Uthman and Ibn Massoud were at their best. Later, Uthman resolved to produce a standard copy of the Qur'an to be the reference work throughout the Muslim world, unanimously approved by all the Prophet's companions as absolutely conforming to the last reading by the Prophet. Ibn Massoud dearly wished that the task would have been assigned to him. He also wished that his own copy that he used to write for himself during the lifetime of the Prophet could be retained. However, on both counts Uthman chose differently.

Uthman chose Zayd ibn Thabit to write the standard copy of the Qur'an. The basis of his decision was the fact that Zayd was the one chosen earlier by Abu Bakr and Umar, during the reign of the former, to collate a complete, standard copy of the Qur'an. Their choice was based on the fact that he was the one who learned the last reading of God's book by the angel Gabriel to the Prophet, shortly before his death. This means that Uthman was right in his choice, even though he, and other companions of the Prophet, were fully aware of Ibn Massoud's standing as a scholar and a greatly devout believer. Uthman was also right when he ordered that all other copies, including that of Ibn Massoud, should be washed out. Unifying the writing of the Qur'an as perfectly as human beings can do was indeed Uthman's greatest action. In the disagreement between the two, the overwhelming majority of the Prophet's companions supported Uthman.

As for Uthman beating Ibn Massoud and denying him his allowance, all this is absolutely false. Indeed, Uthman remained keenly aware of Ibn Massoud's high standing. In return, Ibn Massoud remained firmly loyal to the Caliph he described as the best at the time of his choice.

As for Ammar's case, Al-Khateeb mentions a report related by Al-Tabari which suggests that there was some friction between Ammar and Abbas ibn Utbah. Uthman felt that the two needed to be disciplined by physical punishment. Al-Khateeb states that this is within the right and jurisdiction of the Caliph. Umar used to do that with many people, several of whom were of a higher standing than Ammar.

But this was nothing like the hard beating that the rebels alleged, stating that it was a torture leading to his bowels being torn apart. That would have resulted in his death. Indeed, the punishment did not spoil relations between Uthman and Ammar. When the rebel leaders began their campaign of false rumors against Uthman, some of the Prophet's companions counseled him to dispatch some trusted people to different provinces to gather information on what was happening in these places. He acted on their advice and one of those emissaries was Ammar, whom he sent to Egypt.

We see here that Ammar was one of the people Uthman trusted at his time of trouble. Had he been so severely tortured by Uthman, he would have never been chosen by the Caliph for such a task.

That there was friction between Uthman and some of the Prophet's companions does not detract from the standing of any of them. Uthman is certainly a better person and a better servant of Islam than all the people cited as having disagreed with him, including Ibn Massoud, Ammar, Abu Dharr

and others. Yet this does not mean that any of them should not enjoy our love and respect. They were all among the Prophet's companions with whom the Prophet was pleased. They are all among the dwellers of heaven as confirmed by the Prophet. May God shower His grace on them all.

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Islamic History - 14: Controversy Over Flimsy Issues

Adil Salahi

Arab News

The rebels against Uthman, the third caliph, included in their list of indictment two charges involving two people. They claimed that Uthman "sent Abu Al-Dardaa' out of Syria into exile; and allowed Al-Hakam back into Madinah when it was the Prophet (peace be upon him) who had expelled him." Both charges are without foundation. In his refutation of all the allegations made against Uthman, Abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi has the following to say: Some friction occurred between Abu Al-Dardaa' and Mu'awiyah. Abu Al-Dardaa' was a man of a fine character, and was the chief justice in Damascus. When he maintained a strict standard of justice and followed Umar's approach, the people there could not tolerate it. Hence, he was dismissed and he left for Madinah.

All these are ordinary matters and do not constitute any negative reflection on the integrity or the strength of faith of anyone. Both Abu Dharr and Abu Al-Dardaa' were free of blame, and so was Uthman. Indeed he was a man without a blemish on his character. Whoever claims that he sent people into exile and gave reasons for that should know that it is all false.

As for letting Al-Hakam back into Madinah, the whole claim is false. Refuting it, our teachers maintain that the Prophet had accepted Uthman's pleas on Al-Hakam's behalf. Uthman later spoke to Abu Bakr and Umar informing them of the Prophet's acceptance. They said to him: "If you have a witness, we will let him back." When Uthman became the caliph, he ruled on this point on the basis of his own knowledge. For certain, Uthman would have never maintained good relations with someone the Prophet had abandoned, even if that person were his own father. He would have never overruled a decision by the Prophet.

Again we note that Ibn Al-Arabi is very precise in his refutation of the false allegations. In his annotation of Ibn Al-Arabi's work, Al-Khateeb mentions that Mu'awiyah tried to follow the line followed by Umar. He quotes a report given by Ibn Katheer in his book on history, Al-Bidayah wal-Nihayah, quoting Al-Zuhri: "Mu'awiyah tried for two whole years to meticulously follow Umar's line, but he then abandoned it."

Some people, who have little understanding of how to conduct public affairs, may think that a ruler can adopt the policy of his choosing wherever he happens to be. This is wrong. The local environment influences the ruler and his system of government more than the ruler and his system can influence the social



*Earth, a planet
hungry for peace*



*The Israeli apartheid
(security) wall around
Palestinian population
centers (Ran Cohen,
pmc, 5/24/03).*



*The Israeli apartheid
(security) wall around
Palestinian population
centers in the West
Bank (Ran Cohen,
pmc, 5/24/03).*



environment. This is alluded to in the Qur'anic verse that says: "God does not change a people's situation until they have changed themselves." (13: 11)

Concerning Al-Hakam, the rebels' claim is absolutely false. Ibn Taimiyah says in his book Minhaj Al-Sunnah: "Numerous scholars have discounted the report that the Prophet imposed exile on Al-Hakam. They maintain that he left of his own accord. Indeed, the report of his exile is not mentioned in any of the authentic collections of Hadith, and it is not reported with a proper chain of transmission to verify it. Besides, the people of Makkah whom the Prophet pardoned when the city fell to him remained there and did not migrate to Madinah. Hence, had the Prophet expelled Al-Hakam, he would have expelled him from Makkah, not Madinah. Had he expelled him from Madinah, he would have sent him to Makkah... Furthermore, if the Prophet punished a man sending him into exile, this did not mean that he would remain exiled for the rest of his life. Such a punishment is not prescribed for any offence... On the other hand, Uthman had pleaded the case of Abdullah ibn Saad ibn Abi Sarh, and the Prophet accepted his plea.

He also accepted Abdullah's pledge of loyalty. Why would he not accept Uthman's pleading for Al-Hakam? It is indeed reported that Uthman sought the Prophet's permission for him to return and the Prophet permitted that. We know that Al-Hakam's was a lesser offense than that of Abdullah ibn Saad.

Abdullah's story is confirmed and authentic, while the report concerning Al-Hakam remains lacking in authenticity. It is mentioned by historians in whose reports is included much that is untrue. This means that we do not have any confirmed report to detract from the position of a person who is of a lesser standing than Uthman. Indeed, Uthman's position is unassailable. The Prophet dearly loved and praised him, gave him two of his daughters in marriage (one after the other's death), confirmed that he was among those certain to be admitted into heaven, sent him to Makkah as his representative and made the Ridwan pledge on his behalf as he was absent.

The Prophet's companions chose him as their leader. Umar and others testified that when the Prophet died, he was well pleased with Uthman. All this makes it clear that Uthman was one of the best God-fearing people who earn God's pleasure. All this cannot be discounted on the basis of a flimsy report that is poor in authenticity, blaming Uthman for a fictitious offence..."

Writing in the same vein, Ibn Hazm says in Al-Fisal: "The exile imposed by the Prophet was neither a mandatory punishment nor a legal decision that must be enforced for the rest of time. It was merely a punishment for a particular offence. Repentance is available to all sinners. If he had repented, the punishment would have been waived as unanimously agreed by all Muslims. In this case, he could go anywhere on earth."

Ibn Al-Wazeer, a distinguished Zaydi scholar quotes a report by Al-Muhsin ibn Karamah that mentions the Prophet's acceptance of Uthman's pleading on Al-Hakam's behalf. He goes on to say that this report should be accepted by all followers of the Zaydi school, because it is reported by a person they consider as highly reliable. He follows that with arguments taking three pages in defense of Uthman.

Al-Khateeb concludes his annotation on this point by saying that all these scholars, following different schools of thought, concur in pronouncing Uthman blameless on this point. The whole allegation is absolutely flimsy.

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Islamic History - 15 : Uthman And Shortening Prayers

Author:

Edited by Adil Salahi

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Trying to find religious justification for one's own stand or action has always been the desire of those who take a stand that relies on no firm basis. Within the context of the Islamic state, rebels have always tried to provide evidence from the Qur'an or the Hadith to support their action. Some do not hesitate to twist the meaning of texts and statements in order to gain such justification. Others invent stories and reports to make their stand more acceptable from the Islamic point of view. The rebels against Uthman, the third caliph, were no exception to this rule. But how could they find such justification when Uthman was among the closest to the Prophet of all his companions? Besides, he ruled at a time when many of the Prophet's companions were still alive, and they would have never accepted any deviation from the Prophet's path.

Well, those rebels objected to a certain action Uthman did and blew it out of all proportions in order to give themselves a guise showing them as people eager to maintain the purity of Islamic practice. They claimed that Uthman had stopped the Sunnah of shortening prayers during travel. Abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi replies to this charge as follows: "Opting for offering the prayer without shortening it is a question of choice on the basis of scholarly judgment. He had heard that people were too keen to shorten their prayers and did so in their own quarters. He felt that doing this Sunnah could lead to

abandoning what is obligatory. Hence, he completed his prayers so as to leave no room for confusion. Besides, a number of scholars are of the view that a traveling person has the choice to shorten his prayers or offer them in full length. The Prophet's companions differed on this point."

Al-Khateeb explains this whole issue making it clear that this took place during the pilgrimage season in year 29 of the Islamic calendar. As Uthman was the caliph, he also led the congregational prayer whenever he was present. When the pilgrims are in Mina, they normally offer all their 4-rak'ah prayers in only two rak'ahs each. This is a concession that applies to all travel and to all pilgrims when they are in Mina.

Abd Al-Rahman ibn Awf took up the question with Uthman, asking him the reason for his offering the prayer in full in Mina. Uthman explained that some pilgrims from Yemen and other remote areas said the previous year that prayers were only two rak'ahs, even for local people, justifying their claim on the basis that Uthman, the caliph, offered the prayer in two rak'ahs only. Uthman added that he also had a wife in Makkah, which meant that he considered himself a resident in Makkah. "I thought that it is more advisable that I should offer the prayer in its normal length, so that people would not be confused."

When Abd Al-Rahman ibn Awf left Uthman, he met Abdullah ibn Massoud and spoke to him about this question. Needless to say, Abdullah was one of the best learned scholars among the Prophet's companions. Abdullah said to him: "Controversy is wrong. I heard that Uthman offered the prayer in four rak'ahs, and followed suit offering the prayer with my group in its full length." Abd Al-Rahman said: "I too heard that he offered the prayer in four rak'ahs, but I prayed with my group two rak'ahs only. As from now, I will do as you say." This means that Abd Al-Rahman ibn Awf would follow Uthman's lead and offer the prayer in four rak'ahs.

Most people today agree that during travel, prayers are shortened so as to offer every 4-rak'ah prayer in two rak'ahs only. However, Ibn Al-Arabi mentions that a number of scholars are of the view that a traveling person may choose either to shorten his prayer or to offer it in its normal length. He mentions that the Prophet's companions had different views on this.

Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Ash'ari, a scholar of the Maliki school, mentions that a number of the Prophet's companions offered prayers full length during travel. He mentions that this was done by fourteen of them, including Aishah and Salman. Al-Bukhari relates a Hadith on Aishah's authority stating: "Prayers were originally made in two rak'ahs, then this was continued for traveling people while residents were required to make their prayers full length." Al-Zuhri asked Urwah, both of whom transmitted this Hadith, "Why then did Aishah pray in full during her travel." Urwah, who was Aishah's nephew, said: "She had the same argument as Uthman."

Imam Ahmad relates a report by Abbad ibn Abdullah ibn Al-Zubayr saying: "When Mu'awiyah came over to us to offer the pilgrimage we accompanied him to Makkah. He led the dhuhr prayers, offering it in two rak'ahs only. He then went to Dar Al-Nadwah, (the old meeting place of the Quraysh). As for Uthman, after he offered his prayers in four rak'ahs, he continued to do so, i.e. offering dhuhr, asr and isha in four rak'ahs each, when he arrived in Makkah. But when he left

Makkah for Mina and Arafat, he would offer these prayers in two rak'ahs each. After he finished his pilgrimage rituals and stayed in Mina, he would offer his prayers in normal length, until he left Makkah.

Now when Mu'awiyah offered dhuhhr prayers in two rak'ahs only, Marwan and Amr ibn Uthman objected to what he did. They said to him: "No one had ever shamed your cousin (meaning Uthman) worse than you have shamed him." When he asked them to explain, they said: "Have you not known that he offered his prayers full length in Makkah?" Mu'awiyah protested that he offered his prayers with the Prophet, Abu Bakr and Umar, shortening them. They said: "But your cousin offered them complete."

It appears that Mu'awiyah considered shortening the prayer as a concession which gives a traveling person the choice to either pray in full or in the shortened form. This is evident from the fact that Mu'awiyah prayed asr that day in four rak'ahs.

- Arab News *Islam* 8 September 2003

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Islamic History -16: The Choice of the Early Caliphs

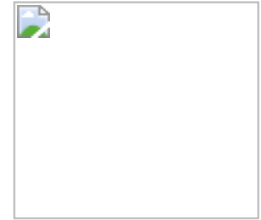
Adil Salahi, Arab News, 9/15/03

The charge often repeated against Uthman, even to our present day, is that he appointed his relatives as governors of different provinces. The rebels mentioned the names of Muawiyah, Abdullah ibn Amir and Marwan as well as Al-Waleed ibn Uqbah, accusing the last of these people of being a transgressor, unfit for such a post. Again when this charge is properly examined, it becomes clear that it does not stand. Because of the nature of this charge, we need to look into the history of the people mentioned. We will begin today with the case of Mu'awiyah. Ibn Al-Arabi has the following to say about his appointment:

As for Mu'awiyah, it was Umar who appointed him as governor of Syria, grouping all Syrian areas under his governorship. Then Uthman confirmed him in his post. In fact, it was Abu Bakr who initiated his appointment, because Abu Bakr appointed his brother Yazeed, and Yazeed appointed him as his deputy. Umar confirmed him in this post because he was keen not to change what Abu Bakr did. Since Yazeed was the governor appointed by Abu Bakr, Umar approved what Yazeed did. Then Uthman endorsed what Umar did. This is a chain of the strongest type. Nothing like it will ever be repeated.

Al-Khateeb adds here a very long footnote, which we will reproduce in summary: "The Muslim state reached its pinnacle during the reigns of Abu Bakr and Umar. It achieved rare human success, with a model community that enjoyed unique happiness. Both Abu Bakr and Umar were endowed with a rare insight that enabled them to recognize men who had qualities of leadership. They were thus able to be highly selective when appointing governors and officers in different provinces of the vast Muslim state. They knew that it was their responsibility to make the best choice they could, and that they would be accountable to God for their choice.

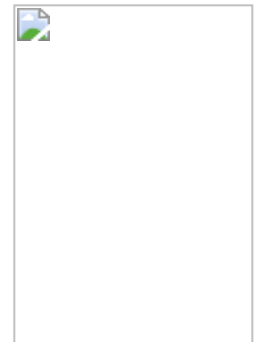
Both Yazeed ibn Abi Sufyan and his brother Mu'awiyah were among the men Abu Bakr chose to help him in shouldering responsibilities in war and peacetime. He certainly made an excellent choice. When Abu Bakr earlier assigned the command of an army to Yazeed ibn Abi Sufyan, he walked with him to bid him farewell. Mu'awiyah is mentioned in history books after his brother only because he was younger. This does not make any negative reflection on his leadership qualities. Prior to serving in Abu Bakr and Umar's governments, Mu'awiyah was assigned certain tasks by the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself. No one can deny that the Prophet used him as a scribe. Writers who were hostile to the Umayyads mention that the Prophet did not



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(security) wall around
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pmc, 5/24/03).*



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use Mu'awiyah to write the Qur'an, but to write ordinary letters. However, they do not produce any evidence to support their claim. Besides, had the Prophet made a distinction between those who used to do his writing, this would have been widely known.

Al-Khateeb makes clear that Mu'awiyah was one of the great figures in Islamic government. He likens him to a lantern that illuminates the way for people, and would have been recognized as an important source of light. However, his light shined next to four suns whose light covered the whole earth. Needless to say, those four lights were the four rightly-guided caliphs who ruled immediately before him, namely Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali. He refers to a report related by Ibn Katheer which quotes Saad ibn Abi Waqqas, one the top ten of the Prophet's companions, as saying: "I have never seen after Uthman anyone whose judgment is closer to justice than the one beyond this door." He was referring to Mu'awiyah.

Ibn Abbas is also quoted as saying: "I have never seen anyone more suitable to rule than Mu'awiyah." One wonders whether anyone could be suitable to rule unless he combines justice with wisdom in his character, demonstrates a clear ability to defend his kingdom, seeks God's help in propagating the message of Islam and is faithful to his trust. If someone is worthy to rule, should Uthman be blamed for appointing him as governor? How could Uthman be blamed when it was Umar who had appointed him? Indeed, Abu Bakr employed him and before that, the Prophet employed him.

One event tells us what sort of man Mu'awiyah was. Umayr ibn Saad was one of the Prophet's companions, from the Aws tribe of the Ansar. He was one of the most pious and God-fearing people. Indeed, he was described as one without peers. It is said that Umar had described him as such in recognition of his qualities. Umar had appointed him governor of Hums in Syria, but then he replaced him with Mu'awiyah. People wondered at his decision. In comment, someone said: "Do not say anything about Mu'awiyah unless you say something good. I heard the Prophet saying: 'My Lord, guide people to the truth through him.'"

Reports differ on who said this, with the statement attributed to either Umar or Umayr. Whichever of them said it, it is a great testimony for Mu'awiyah. If it was Umar who said it, then that it is a testimonial of the finest sort, considering Umar's close relation with the Prophet. If it was Umayr who said it, it is an equally fine testimony from the man who was relieved of his post to make way for Mu'awiyah.

Ibn Taimiyah writes: "Mu'awiyah's policy with his people was one of the finest among all rulers. He was very popular among his people." In an authentic Hadith related by both Al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet is quoted as saying: "The best of your rulers are those whom you love and who love you, and you pray

for them and they pray for you; and the worst of your rulers are those whom you hate and they hate you, and you curse them and they curse you.”

We will have reason to discuss Mu’awiyah’s character further in a future article when we speak about his reign.

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Islamic History - 17: Uthman's Relatives as Governors

Adil Salahi

Arab News, 9/22/03

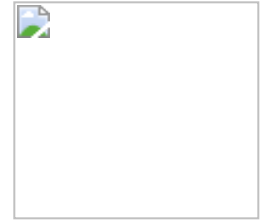
When Uthman, the third Caliph, is mentioned today, many people react in a way indicating that they consider him to be at a different level to his predecessors. While the first two Caliphs were exceptional in their greatness, Uthman would rank among the greatest rulers in the history of any nation. Yet somehow, he is begrudged his outstanding position of distinction, even by people who profess to love him as one of the earliest companions of the Prophet. When pressed for a reason, they say that his main fault was to appoint his relatives as governors of different provinces. They point out Mu'awiyah and a couple more. We mentioned that when Uthman became Caliph, Mu'awiyah was already the governor of Syria, appointed in that post by Umar who trusted him without reservations.

When people say this, they are only echoing those rebels who had no love for the Prophet's companions. They were the ones who took up this issue, saying that in addition to Mu'awiyah, he appointed people like Abdullah ibn Amir and Marwan as governors; as well as Al-Waleed ibn Uqbah who was a transgressor, unfit for such a post. But when people thoughtlessly repeat such accusations, they simply do not know what they are talking about. In his refutation of the accusations against Uthman, Justice Abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi, a leading authority among the scholars of Andalusia, says:

As for Abdullah ibn Amir, Uthman appointed him because he belonged to a distinguished family, with noble paternal and maternal aunts. Because some people harbor ill intentions, they rush to highlight the bad rather than the good. The fabricators alleged that Uthman only appointed Al-Waleed ibn Uqbah for the first reason he mentioned when he said: "I have not appointed Al-Waleed because he is my brother, but because he is the grandson of Umm Hakeem Al-Baydaa', the twin sister of the Prophet's father." But more of this later.

Choosing governors and officials is a matter of discretion. Umar appointed Saad ibn Abi Waqqas then replaced him with someone who was of a lesser degree. What those people say about Marwan and Al-Waleed is an enormity. To label them as transgressors is indeed an act of transgression on their part.

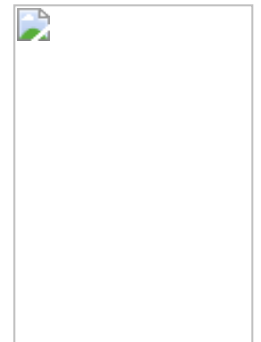
Before we move forward with Ibn Al-Arabi in his defense of Uthman in appointing such people as province governors, we need to know more about them. Today with most people receiving only very scanty knowledge about Islamic history, we



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need to answer the question: who were Abdullah ibn Amir, Al-Waleed ibn Uqbah and Marwan? We will speak about the first two today and will continue next week, God willing.

Abdullah ibn Amir belonged to the Abd Shams branch of the Quraysh tribe, but his maternal uncles belonged to the Hashim branch to which the Prophet belonged. His father's mother was Arwa bint Kurayz, and Arwa's mother was Al-Baydaa' bint Abd Al-Muttalib, the Prophet's aunt. When Abdullah was born, he was brought to the Prophet who looked at him and said to his paternal uncles: "He looks more like us than he looks like you." He placed a little of his saliva in his mouth and the child swallowed it. The Prophet commented: "I hope he will have plenty of water." When he grew up, water gushed out of any piece of land he looked after.

He was known to be very generous and a military commander who combined foresight with courage. He fought in what is today the Islamic Republic of Iran, defeating the armies of the Persian Empire, and liberating vast areas of its land, including Khurasan and Sejjistan, reaching today's Afghanistan. His battles resulted in the final collapse of the Persian Empire. Hence, it is not surprising that the remnants of the pre-Islamic Persian regime should harbor grudges against him and try to distort his image. In fact, Ibn Katheer says of him: "He was the first to provide basins for water storage in Arafat, so that the pilgrims would not be short of clean water." Ibn Taymiyah says: "Abdullah had many good qualities and undeniably enjoyed people's love."

Al-Waleed ibn Uqbah was also a man of great talent, intelligence and immense courage. Long before Uthman's reign, Abu Bakr used him to carry his military correspondence to Khalid ibn Al-Waleed, his commander who was about to engage the Persian army in a major battle in year 12. He subsequently sent him at the head of reinforcements given to Iyad ibn Ghunm Al-Fihri. He also served in a civilian capacity for Abu Bakr, administering the zakah of the Quda'ah, a major Arabian tribe. When Abu Bakr subsequently embarked on fighting the Byzantine Empire in Syria, he appointed Amr ibn Al-As and Al-Waleed to lead the Muslim armies. Amr moved to Palestine while Al-Waleed moved to the areas that today form Jordan.

In year 15, during Umar's reign, Al-Waleed was appointed governor of the northern provinces in eastern Syria, where the Arab tribes of Rabeeah and Tanookh lived. This was a sensitive province because large sections of its inhabitants were non-Muslims, and his forces included many of them. He secured the region and provided cover for Muslim armies fighting the Byzantines in northern Syria.

At the same time he was very active in Islamic advocacy among the non-Muslim population of these tribes. Needless to say, there was no coercion employed in such activities, because Islam lays down that no compulsion may be exercised in promoting

religious belief. People must choose their faith with complete freedom. However, some people in Rabeeah resented his advocacy efforts and feared that the young among them might be influenced by the strong and logical argument of Islam. To avoid any problem with Rabeeah, Umar decided to replace Al-Waleed.

This shows that Al-Waleed was a trusted official during the reigns of Abu Bakr and Umar. Uthman could not be blamed for using such a person with proven qualities of leadership. But then people speak ill of Uthman and Al-Waleed because they were half brothers. We will discuss this in more detail next week, God willing.

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False Testimony Against Uthman's Relatives

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We talked about some of Uthman's relatives whom the rebels cited as unworthy of their posts or the favors they received. These were Al-Waleed ibn Uqbah and Marwan ibn Al-Hakam, who was later to become Caliph, as did his son and five of his grandsons, one of whom was Umar ibn Abd Al-Aziz. In his refutation of the allegations leveled at Uthman, Justice Abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi says the following:

Choosing governors and officials is a matter of discretion. Umar appointed Saad ibn Abi Waqqas then replaced him with someone who was of a lesser degree. What those people say about Marwan and Al-Waleed is an enormity. To label them as transgressors is indeed an act of transgression on their part. Marwan was considered by the Prophet's companions, their successors the tabieen, and major scholars as a man of integrity. Among the Prophet's companions, Sahl ibn Saad transmitted some Hadiths from him, and the tabieen were of his own age, although some reports suggest that he could be considered a companion of the Prophet. All major scholars in all areas respected him highly, acknowledged him as a legitimate Caliph, and considered his rulings as valid. Others who are less worthy of note, such as historians and literary figures, may say what suits their station.

As for Al-Waleed, some commentators claim that he was described as “evildoer” in the Qur’anic verse that says: “Believers! If any evildoer comes to you with a piece of news, make sure of it first, lest you should wrong others unwittingly and then regret your action.” (49: 6) They allege that the Prophet sent him to the Al-Mustalaq tribe and when he came back he reported that they had reverted to disbelief. The Prophet then sent Khalid ibn Al-Waleed to confirm the report, and Khalid reported back that this was not true. Moreover, there are conflicting reports about this, with a second report suggesting that the above verse was revealed in connection with another event in which both Al-Waleed ibn Uqbah and Ali were involved. It is also suggested that Al-Waleed was one of the children who rushed to meet the Prophet when he entered Makkah to liberate it. The Prophet rubbed their heads except for Al-Waleed. He then explained that he had applied some perfume and the Prophet did not wish to touch it, as he was in consecration. If he was a child then, could he have been sent to verify a report? When similarly conflicting reports are made in connection with a valid Hadith, scholars discard it. How could such reports label anyone as evildoer? And how if he were a companion of the Prophet?

As for punishing him for drinking, Umar did the same with Qudamah ibn Mazoun when he was a governor, then sacked him. It is also reported that he later made it up with him. A person who commits a sin, then genuinely repents, does not lose his standing as a person of integrity.

It was said to Uthman: “You have appointed Al-Waleed because he is your half brother, born to your mother Arwa bint Kurayz.” He replied: “No, but because he is the grandson of the Prophet’s aunt, Umm Hakeen Al-Baydaa’, the twin sister of his father.” We wonder why should anyone exclude his brother or relative from appointment to any office?

The first part of this quotation from Ibn Al-Arabi establishes the position of Marwan ibn Al-Hakam, who was highly respected by scholars before he became Caliph in year 65. His reign lasted less than a year, but he had established his standing well before that, and he was considered as reliable by scholars of Hadith. This in itself is a high testimony for him. Indeed, scholars of Hadith like Al-Bukhari and Imam Ahmad include Hadiths which are transmitted by different tabieen through him. Trying to discredit him is a futile exercise that could be made only by people who do not have the interests of Islam and the Muslim community at heart.

Al-Waleed ibn Uqbah comes for much criticism by the rebels and those who take their cue from them. The first point mentioned by Ibn Al-Arabi is the claim that he was the “evildoer” to which the above-quoted Qur’anic verse refers. This is highly unlikely, considering his age. The report stated by Ibn Al-Arabi shows him to be rushing with other children to meet the Prophet in year 8, when he arrived in Makkah. Most probably he was between 12 and 15 at the time, which means that by the time the Prophet died he was less than 18. The Prophet could not have sent someone of that age as an emissary to a tribe. Those who try to discredit Al-Waleed also mention that the Prophet did not rub his head as he did with the other children who came to meet him. They consider this as indicative that the Prophet had been told by God not to rub his head for his future misconduct. This cannot be proven in anyway. Besides, Al-Waleed mentions the reason as his having put some perfume, and the Prophet did not wish to touch it because he was in the state of consecration, or ihraam, when we are not permitted to touch perfume.

The two reports are clearly in conflict and cannot be reconciled. If Al-Waleed was a child two years before the Prophet's death, the Prophet could have never sent him as an emissary. By contrast, if he actually sent him, he must have been older than what they suggest, and in this case, he would not have been with the children who met the Prophet.

Al-Khateeb mentions that he researched all the reports that mention Al-Waleed as the referent of the Qur'anic verse. He says that his reason for undertaking this research was not any assumption that Al-Waleed could not do a grave sin to deserve such a description. He simply felt that since both Abu Bakr and Umar trusted him and assigned some sensitive missions to him, the description could not apply to him. To start with, they would have known to whom the verse referred, since they were witnesses of all events taking place at the time. If it was him and God described him as evildoer, neither of them would have placed him in a position of trust.

Al-Khateeb says that his research shows that all reports claiming that Al-Waleed was the man involved are traceable to scholars of the second century, none of whom mentions any chain of transmission going back to Al-Waleed's time. This leaves a gap of over a century, with no reliable reporter mentioned. Such a report then falls according to the criteria established by scholars of Hadith.

— Arab News *Islam* 6 October 2003



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We have dealt with most of the accusations leveled at Uthman by the rebels who did not stop until they had killed him. We have quoted Justice Ibn Al-Arabi and Muhibb Al-Deen Al-Khateeb's annotation to explain these. But the list of accusations was by no means short. For example, they accused him of making a gift of one-fifth of the spoils gained in the war that liberated today's Tunisia, which was known as Ifriqiya, to Marwan. Ibn Al-Arabi has the following to say about this: "As for gifting one-fifth of the spoils of Ifriqiya to one person, it is not true. However, Imam Malik and other scholars are of the view that the ruler has complete discretion on how to divide the share of one-fifth, and to act on his discretion. If he wishes to give it to one person, he is free to do so."

What all this is concerned with is the fact that in Islamic law, one fifth of the spoils of war goes to the Muslim state, and the ruler should give it to those who are

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descendents of the Prophet (peace be upon him), the needy, orphans and travelers in need. Ibn Al-Arabi makes clear that Imam Malik considers that the ruler has sole and free discretion on how to use it. Other scholars have different views. However, the whole accusation is false. Uthman did not give this one-fifth to any one person.

Al-Khateeb adds the following details: “What is true is that he gave one-fifth of the share of the state, i.e. 20 percent of 20 percent of the spoils of war to Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh, the commander of the army which liberated the region, but he took it back later. Al-Tabari mentions that Uthman ordered Abdullah to launch a campaign from Egypt up to Tunisia, and said to him: ‘If tomorrow God gives you victory and you have Ifriqiya, you will get from the spoils the Muslims gain one fifth of the one fifth of the state as your free share.’ He started his campaign, moving deep into Ifriqiya, securing its plains and mountains. Abdullah divided the spoils of war among the soldiers in line with the Islamic rule, and took for himself his promised share of 20 percent of the one-fifth due to the state, and sent the rest to Uthman. The people who carried it to Madinah complained to Uthman about Abdullah’s share. Uthman said to them: ‘I have given him this share, but if you are displeased, then I will claim it back.’ They said that they were displeased. Therefore, Uthman wrote to Abdullah to give it back, and he did.”

Uthman acted within his jurisdiction. What he did was done before him by the Prophet and Umar, and was done after him by Ali. All of them gave large gifts to certain people because they felt it served the interests of the community.

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People claim that Uthman used to favor his relatives with gifts. He certainly did and this is one of his virtues. Ali praised Uthman for being the kindest of all the Prophet's companions to his relatives. Uthman himself explained his attitude to his relatives saying: "They claim that I love my family and give them gifts. My love of them has never caused me to be unjust to others on their account. Indeed, I make them shoulder more responsibility when dealing with others. What I give them comes out of my own property. I have never considered the property of the Muslim community to be lawful for me to take or to give to anyone else. I used to give generously from my own property during the Prophet's lifetime and during the reigns of Abu Bakr and Umar, when I was still keen to retain my wealth. Now that I have attained to old age and my life is coming to an end, people would claim this about me!"

What Uthman did was to distribute his own wealth among his relatives, treating his cousins in the same way as his own children. This is indeed the action of one who was preparing to depart this life. Since he felt it unlawful to take any money from the public treasury for himself, he was less likely to take it for his relatives, or indeed anyone else. The allegations of those who rebelled against him thus fall.

The rebels made further allegations against him, some of which are ridiculous indeed. They said, for example: "While Umar used his whip, Uthman used a stick to beat people." Ibn Al-Arabi says in reply to this allegation: "As for him using a stick to beat people, the truth is that I never heard this from anyone, pious or not. It is all false, and its falsehood would be readily apparent to anyone who investigates it a little."

But who would Uthman beat with his stick? Certainly not grown up men. And if beating by a ruler was appropriate, considering what they say about Umar, why would using a whip be preferable to using a stick. The whole accusation stinks.

They made a further allegation saying that “Uthman mounted a step up on the pulpit to be at the level used by the Prophet while Abu Bakr and Umar moved a step down.” What this is concerned with is the position where the Caliph stood when addressing the people, either before Friday prayer or indeed at any time he wanted to convey something to them. The fact is that Abu Bakr and Umar each lowered his position a step, but it is not to be expected that every successive ruler will take a further step down. Otherwise, with the passage of time, rulers and speech makers would go down below the floor level.

Ibn Al-Arabi refutes this allegation, saying: “I have never heard this from anyone who has a trace of the fear of God left in his heart. It is all a matter of spreading false rumors in order to change people’s hearts against Uthman. Our leading scholars say that had this been true, it would have been no cause to justify killing him. It is inevitably right for him to do so, because no one of the Prophet’s companions objected to it, because they realized that it is permissible for him. If it was not true, then nothing more can be said about it.”

This is a strong argument by Ibn Al-Arabi, because if Uthman did it and the Prophet’s companions agreed to it, then it is right. Al-Khateeb, however, explains that the Prophet’s mosque was small during the lifetime of the Prophet and the reign of Abu Bakr. One of the generous deeds of Uthman which he did when the Prophet was still alive was that when he saw that

the number of the Prophet's companions has increased, he bought a piece of land adjacent to the mosque and made it an extension. Then Umar extended it further, incorporating in it Al-Abbas' home. The number of worshipers continued to increase as the population of the city increased and the number of people coming to Madinah from all over the Muslim world increased. Therefore, Uthman once again extended it, making it 160 yards in length and 150 yards wide. With this expansion, it was perhaps necessary for the speaker to move up so that he could be seen and heard by all.

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Uthman's Absence On Important Occasions

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The assassins who killed Uthman, the third Caliph, leveled many accusations at him, which were reiterated later by people who took a stand against him for political or sectarian reasons, or out of ignorance. One of these accusations refers to his absence on important occasions that took place during the Prophet's lifetime. His accusers claim "he did not take part in the Battle of Badr, and fled during the Battle of Uhud, and was absent on the day when the Prophet's companions made the pledge under the tree, known as Bay'at Al-Ridwan." This accusation is very flimsy and falls apart when we know the circumstances of each of these occasions. Justice Abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi has this to say about it:

Abdullah ibn Umar, the leading scholar among the Prophet's companions, explained the situation on all three occasions. As for the Battle of Hunayn, only a very small number of his companions remained alongside the Prophet. We do not have any authentic report detailing who fled and who remained. The reports we have give different information. One report suggests that those who stayed with the Prophet were only his uncle Al-Abbas, backed by Al-Abbas' two sons, Abdullah and Qutham. Since these reports do not agree, their difference should be enough to stop all argument.

Besides, temporary desertion on that day was common to many of the Prophet's companions, and God and His messenger pardoned them. Hence, it is not permissible to mention what God, His messenger and the believers have dropped.

Al-Bukhari relates a Hadith stating: "A man asked Abdullah ibn Umar about Uthman, and Abdullah mentioned some of his great deeds. He then asked the man: 'Perhaps mentioning all this displeases you?' The man confirmed that it did. Ibn Umar said: 'May God thwart you!' The man asked him about Ali and he mentioned some of his great deeds, and added: 'Look at his house there in the middle of the Prophet's homes. Perhaps this displeases you?' the man confirmed that it did. Ibn Umar said to him: 'May God thwart you. You may go and say about me whatever you wish!'"

Al-Bukhari also relates: "A man from Egypt was on his way to perform the pilgrimage when he saw a group of people sitting together. He inquired about them and he was told that they belonged to the tribe of Quraysh. He asked: 'Who is the learned man among them.' He was told: 'Abdullah ibn Umar.' He addressed him saying: 'I want to ask you about something and please speak to me about it. Do you know that Uthman fled during the Battle of Uhud?' Ibn Umar answered in the affirmative. The man asked him: 'Do you know that he was absent from the Battle of Badr?' Again the answer was in the affirmative. The man put his third question: 'Do you know that he was not present either at the time of the pledge known as Bay'at Al-Ridwan?' Ibn Umar said: 'Yes.' Elated, the man said: 'God is great.' Ibn Umar said to him: 'Come forward and I will explain things to you. As for his flight on the Day of Uhud, I declare that God has forgiven him. And as for his absence on the Day of Badr, he was married to the Prophet's daughter and she was ill. The Prophet told him to stay back to look after her. He later said to him: 'You will have the same reward and share of the booty as anyone who took part in the Battle of Badr.' And as for Bay'at Al-Ridwan, had there been among the Prophet's companions anyone with better standing in Makkah than Uthman, the Prophet would have sent him in his stead. However, the Prophet sent Uthman (as his ambassador to the people of Makkah) and the Bay'at Al-Ridwan took place after Uthman had gone there. The Prophet raised his right hand and said: 'This is Uthman's hand' and held his two hands together saying: 'And this on Uthman's behalf.' Ibn Umar then said to the man: 'Take with you what I have just said.'"

We perhaps need to further explain some of the points mentioned in this Hadith. The first concerns the Battle of Badr when the Prophet asked Uthman to stay behind to nurse his wife, Ruqayyah, the Prophet's daughter, who was on her deathbed. When victory was achieved by the Muslims in Badr, the Prophet sent his companion Zayd ibn Harithah with the news of the great victory to Uthman in Madinah. Usamah ibn Zayd reports: "We received the news just after having buried Ruqayyah, the Prophet's daughter married to Uthman. The Prophet had asked the two of us to look after her." (Related by Al-Tabari). Six months later, Uthman married the Prophet's other daughter Umm Kulthoom.

Bay'at Al-Ridwan was the pledge the Prophet's companions gave him to fight the Quraysh to the finish. They practically pledged that they would fight to the last drop of their blood. This took place when the Prophet traveled with 1,400 of his companions, aiming to visit the Kaabah in Makkah for worship. As its custodians, the Quraysh were duty bound to let them do that, since no one might be turned away from Makkah, if he came for worship. However, the Quraysh felt that the Muslims entry would be a sign of their own weakness. Hence they resolved on preventing them.

However, they sent emissaries to the Prophet to try to persuade him to leave, but after their three emissaries advised the Quraysh to let the Muslims visit Makkah for worship, and they continued to refuse, the Prophet felt that he should send them someone to assure them that he had no intention to fight or claim supremacy. His first choice was Umar, but Umar said: “Messenger of God! I fear that the Quraysh will not respect my mission, and there is no one from my clan in Makkah to give me protection. I suggest that Uthman is far more honored in the city than me.” The Prophet sent him as his personal ambassador to speak to Abu Sufyan and the other tribal chiefs in Makkah.

However Uthman stayed in Makkah several days, which was much longer than expected. Soon news were given to the Prophet that he was killed in Makkah. Hence the Prophet called on his companions to pledge their commitment to him to fight the people of Makkah for killing his ambassador. This means that the very pledge of Bay’at Al-Ridwan was made in Uthman’s honor. What could be more honorable to him than that the Muslim community, led by the Prophet, should commit themselves to fight to the finish to avenge his suspected killing. Had he not been highly respected by the Prophet and the Muslims, they would not make such a commitment. At the last moment, the Prophet received more reliable news that Uthman was alive and that the earlier report about his killing was false. But the Prophet continued taking the pledge, because it was an honorable act. Needless to say, the Prophet’s declared intention to avenge Uthman’s killing was a gesture confirming his great honor. No sane person could take his absence at the time of this pledge against him. How could he be present, when he was presumed dead? But indeed, he took part in it, with the Prophet putting his own hand on Uthman’s behalf.

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Uthman's Ruling On A Conspirator's Case

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So far, we have seen how all the accusations leveled at Uthman, the third caliph, easily fall apart on scrutiny. The fact that the list of indictment brought against him by the rebels was so long and relied on extremely flimsy evidence shows those rebels for what they were: masses led by a group of evil conspirators who were intent on killing the caliph, a man of great integrity, piety and compassion. By killing him they hoped to level a devastating blow at the very foundation of the Muslim state and, consequently, at Islam itself. They were prepared to pose as defenders of Islam and Islamic law when all they wanted was to undermine Islam and see its foundations crumble.

One of the charges they brought against the caliph was that he did not operate Islamic law in a case of unlawful killing when the killer was well known. The victim was a Persian called Al-Hurmuzan, killed by Ubaydallah ibn Umar after his father was killed by another Persian known as Abu Lu'luah. The rebels accused Uthman of "refusing to put Ubaydallah ibn Umar to death for killing Al-Hurmuzan." They maintained that by so doing Uthman thwarted Islamic law when he had no right to do so.

There is no doubt that no ruler may pardon a killer unless the relatives of the victim forgo their right for equal punishment (i.e. a death sentence against the offender) and accept blood money in compensation for their loss. However, this case was exceptional in more ways than one. Let us first of all look at what Justice Abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi has to say on this case.

“As for his refusal to kill Ubaydellah ibn Umar ibn Al-Khattab in punishment for his killing of Al-Hurmuzan, the whole accusation is baseless. He could not have done so when the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) were present in large numbers and the case was so fresh. It has been said that Al-Hurmuzan was active in the plot to kill Umar and that he carried the knife used for the killing and it was seen under his clothes. Besides, he was killed before Uthman was elected caliph. It might have been the case that Uthman considered that Ubaydellah had no case to answer after having ascertained the case against Al-Hurmuzan. Moreover, no one sought punishment for Al-Hurmuzan’s killing. Bearing all this in mind, how could Uthman look into a case that was not made in the first place?”

The first point Ibn Al-Arabi makes in defense of Uthman relates to the presence of the Prophet’s companions in large numbers in Madinah. In fact most of them were still there, because Umar had asked him to stay in Madinah during his reign. All the Prophet’s companions were keen to see Islam implemented fully, because they were the ones who experienced life before Islam and knew the high level to which Islam had raised them. They were not prepared to compromise any Islamic principle or ruling. To them, this was a matter of faith for which they were answerable to God. Thus, if they felt that the caliph was lax in implementing the law, they would have been outspoken against him. In this case, none of them spoke. It is inconceivable that all of them would be complacent in a case of this magnitude.

In his annotation of Ibn Al-Arabi’s book, Al-Khateeb mentions a report attributed to Al-Qumabadhan ibn Al-Hurmuzan, who was at the center of this affair. He is quoted as saying: “When Uthman took office, he called me in and gave me full authority over Ubaydellah ibn Umar, saying: ‘Son, this is the man who killed your father. You have more authority over him. Take him and kill him if you wish.’ As I took him away, every one in the city came out with me, appealing to me to let him go. I asked them: ‘Am I free to kill him?’ They said: ‘Yes.’ I asked: ‘Can you stop me if I want to kill him?’ They answered: ‘No.’ And they hurled verbal abuse at him. Therefore, I let him go for God’s sake and for their sake. They were so pleased that they carried me over their shoulders until I reached home.”

Another report mentioned by Al-Tabari in his voluminous history shows Uthman making his decision after consultations with the Prophet’s companions. The report states that Uthman invited their views and Ali suggested that Ubaydellah should be put to death for killing someone who had no proven case against him. Several others from among the Muhajireen and the Ansar said: “Umar was killed a few days ago. Is his son to be killed today? How could this be?” Amr ibn Al-Aas said to Uthman: “God has been kind to you as this event took place when you had no authority over the Muslim community. Indeed you were not in power when it happened.” At the end of the consultation, Uthman said: “I am their guardian and I rule for the payment of blood money, and I will undertake payment from my own purse.” Together these two reports give us the full story. It might have been that Uthman spoke to Al-Hurmuzan’s son first and let him have the power to exact revenge killing, but the people in Madinah tried to persuade him to let Ubaydellah go, which he did

when he saw practically all the people in Madinah begging him to do so. Uthman might have then felt that the man was unduly pressurized to forgo his right. As a caliph, he felt that he needed to consult the Prophet's companions. This accounts for the view expressed by several companions of the Prophet about Umar's son being killed a few days after his father's assassination. But this could not have been a consideration unless the circumstances made the punishment of Ubaydallah ibn Umar exceedingly terrible. Besides, Amr ibn Al-Aas' view that Uthman did not need to take action in this question since it took place prior to his taking office does not carry much weight. If a crime is committed in the short period between the death of one caliph and the election of another, the offender must be punished by the new caliph. He cannot allow God's law to be sidelined, under the pretext that the crime occurred when he had no authority. Certainly his new authority requires him to take action to ensure that the criminal is punished.

These reports show that there was much confusion in Madinah after the assassination of Umar, with people trying to find grounds to reduce tension and tragedy. It may have been that some, if not many, of the Prophet's companions had their suspicions concerning the role of the murdered man, Al-Hurmuzan, in Umar's assassination but did not have hard evidence to confirm them. Al-Tabari mentions a third report quoting Abd Al-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr who said on the day of Umar's assassination: "I passed by Abu Lu'luah last night and found him deep in consultation with Jufaynah (a Christian from Al-Heerah in the Persian Empire) and Al-Hurmuzan. When I approached them, they were startled and rose. They dropped a dagger with two blades, and a handle in the middle. I suppose we should determine the type of weapon used in the murder." Al-Tabari adds that a man from the Tameem tribe went after him and then came back. He had chased Abu Lu'luah after he had stabbed Umar until he was able to take him. Now he brought the dagger Abd Al-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr had described. When Ubaydallah ibn Umar heard of this, he held back until his father, Umar, died. He then went out and killed Al-Hurmuzan.

This means that suspicion that Al-Hurmuzan was heavily involved in the plot to assassinate Umar was very strong and held by a number of the Prophet's companions. Hence, they felt that Ubaydallah ibn Umar was fully justified in killing him. To allow him to be executed as a result would have been an act of injustice. Since they lacked the firm evidence to confirm their suspicions, they could only appeal to Al-Hurmuzan's son. When the man responded to their pleas, Uthman generously satisfied Al-Hurmuzan's family by paying them blood money. He was most caring, compassionate and generous.



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The Letter Of Deceit Forged Against Uthman

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Over the last few weeks we answered 14 of the 15 charges the rebels against the third Caliph Uthman ibn Affan, used to justify their rebellion and subsequent assassination of this rightly-guided caliph. We will now tackle the last of their accusations before we speak about the leaders of the rebels and how things developed in Madinah leading to Uthman's horrendous assassination and his noble attitude throughout.

The last of their accusations claims that "he sent a letter to Abdullah ibn Saad ibn Abi Sarh with a servant of his, riding his own camel, asking him to kill all those mentioned in the letter." This is yet another false claim with an infinite degree of absurdity. Let us first of all consider what Justice Ibn Al-Arabi says about it in his very concise style:

"As for their assertion that the letter was found with a rider or a servant — who incidentally no one claimed to be a slave belonging to Uthman — addressed to Abdullah ibn Saad ibn Abi Al-Sarh commanding him to kill its bearers, Uthman said to them when they made these charges: 'You either bring two witnesses to testify that what you claim is true, or I state under oath that I had never written such a letter or given such an order. It is not difficult to write something and falsely attribute it to a certain person, or to imitate his handwriting, or to forge his seal.' They demanded

that he should hand Marwan ibn Al-Hakam over to them but he refused. Had he handed him over to them, he would have been guilty of injustice. What they could have done was to put their case against Marwan or anyone else to Uthman. Any case they could prove against Marwan would be judged by Uthman, the caliph, who would then be the one responsible for enforcing judgment. Indeed Uthman was one of the early Muslims who occupied a senior position among the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and always maintained an exemplary conduct. Nothing was proved against him that could justify removing him from power, let alone killing him.”

What Ibn Al-Arabi is stating here is the right procedure of enforcing Islamic law against anyone. As the head of state, the caliph is the highest law administrator in the Muslim state. Hence, a complaint against any person, including the caliph himself, should be put to the caliph, or to any competent judge he appoints. Such a complaint would then be considered and the caliph or the appropriate law officers would then be able to enforce the judgment. This would have been a simple procedure that ensured an appropriate consideration of the charges and arrived at a proper judgment. Uthman was keen that the rule of law should be maintained. At the time, a large number of the Prophet’s companions were still living in Madinah, and everyone of them could demand an appropriate legal procedure to consider the claims against the caliph or anyone else. We have seen how Uthman enforced judgment against his own half brother when his accusers produced two witnesses, which was the legal proof required. He enforced judgment despite the fact that he was convinced of his brother’s innocence. He said to his brother: “We will enforce judgment and let the perjurer suffer the punishment of hell.”

With such a keen desire to enforce the law that Uthman believed to be God’s law and recognized his own responsibility of administering it, Uthman was prepared to listen to the charges against him and put them through the legal process. Hence, he required his accusers to produce two witnesses to support their claims or he would deny the claims under oath. This is the requirement of Islamic law in any accusation made against any person. The burden of proof is borne by the accuser. Failing such a proof, the accused is required to deny the accusation under oath. Uthman also pointed out to them the possibility that the letter they had in their hand was forged. His statement is very clear: “You either bring two witnesses to testify that what you claim is true, or I state under oath that I had never written such a letter or given such an order. It is not difficult to write something and falsely attribute it to a certain person, or to imitate his handwriting, or to forge his seal.”

Al-Khateeb points out two issues that make this accusation totally absurd. The first is the claim that the rebels found this letter with a servant of Uthman, but the man they named was merely a shepherd who attended charity camels. These camels were given either as part of people’s zakah, or donated to the state as charity so that they would be used by the Muslim armies to carry soldiers to the battlefield. There were thousands of such camels in Madinah, and scores, if not hundreds, of people were employed to tend them. The turnover among them was very high. This means that many of them were not known in person to any of the high officials in government, let alone to the caliph personally. However, if it were true that the letter was carried by one of these shepherds, it was perfectly easy that the rebels might have hired him to do so, in order to give credence to their accusation.

The point being made by Al-Khateeb here is that the rebel leaders did not only forge the letter, but also hired a shepherd tending the charity camels to carry it. He explains that the bulk of the rebels departed from Madinah after Uthman stated his arguments, which they found very convincing. But two of the rebel leaders stayed behind. These were Al-Ashtar and Hukaym ibn Jablah. He points an accusing finger against these two in forging the letter and hiring the shepherd. They then managed to get the shepherd stopped by the departing rebel army. On “discovering” the forged letter, the rebels returned to Madinah more determined to put an end to Uthman’s rule.

Al-Khateeb also mentions that Muhammad ibn Abi Hudhayfah, Uthman’s undutiful stepson, was at the same time in Egypt trying to raise support for the rebellion and forging letters which he claimed to have been written by the wives of the Prophet. He did much more in deceiving people. He would hire some men and put some of them on top of a house, exposed to the sun for many hours and would at the same time detain camels without feeding them for a few days so as to look thin. He would then give a man with a sunburnt face a forged letter and send him with a couple of others similarly sunburnt, giving them such camels to ride, so that they would appear to have been traveling for a long time. These people would then go out of Egypt to the road used by travelers from Madinah. When they have traveled a distance, they sent back one of them to tell people in Egypt to expect them. They then gave them the letters, which were read in the main mosque as though they were sent by the Prophet’s wives, complaining against Uthman’s rule and encouraging rebellion. It was with such tactics that the rebellion was resumed after Uthman had shown the rebels that they had no case against him, and they were convinced with his argument.

Al-Khateeb also points out that Uthman could have never written such a letter to Abdullah, his governor in Egypt, because he had already permitted him to come to Madinah and then learned that Abdullah was already on his way to Madinah. However, we will have more to say about this letter later.

Imam Ibn Taymiyah also denies any possibility that Uthman could have written such a letter. He says: “Anyone who knows Uthman’s character would know that he could have never ordered the killing of Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr or anyone else. He was never known to kill anyone for merely objecting to his rule. Indeed the rebels sought to kill Uthman, and Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr was one of those who forced their way into Uthman’s house. He never ordered anyone to fight them back to protect himself. How could he have plotted their killing when they had not yet committed any offense to justify that.



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The Rebellion Against Uthman: People Behind The Conspiracy

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We have seen how the case presented by the rebels against Uthman, the third rightly guided caliph, falls apart when closely examined, despite the long list of indictment his enemies had coined up. But those rebels were determined to achieve their purpose. So it is important to know who led the rebellion against such a great servant of Islam as Uthman, whom the Prophet (peace be upon him) highly valued and praised in clear terms. In his very concise style, Justice Ibn Al-Arabi has the following to say about them:

“The best that has been reported in this case is that his judgment led some people to turn against him because of some grudges they harbored. They either were denied something they sought, or coveted some gains to which they had no claim, or were hardly religious people – looking for worldly gains rather than what they might have in the hereafter. When you look at them, their reputation will tell you that they were mean and had no case whatsoever. Their leader was Al-Ghafiqi, an Egyptian, and their main figures included Kinanh ibn Bishr Al-Tujaybi, Sudan ibn Hamran, Abdullah ibn Budayl ibn Warqaa Al-Khuaz’ie, Hukaym ibn Jablah of Basrah and Malik ibn Al-Harith who was known as Al-Ashtar. These were the leaders of the rebels, so what can be said about the rest?”

The last sentence we quoted gives a clear impression of what Justice Ibn Al-Arabi thought of these people. But we need to have some more details about them. For this we turn to Al-Khateeb who writes in his annotation of Ibn Al-Arabi's book that their leader was Al-Ghafiqi ibn Harb Al-Akki, a descendent of some prominent Yemeni families that settled in Egypt after it was taken over by the Muslims. Then Abdullah ibn Saba', the true instigator of the whole rebellion, professed to be loyal to Ali, but he found no fertile soil for his intrigue in either the Hijaz or Syria. He managed, however, to win some following in Kufah and Basrah in Iraq before moving to Al-Fustat, the then capital of Egypt. There he was able to win some recruits, including Al-Ghafiqi ibn Harb. It was not difficult to win him over because of his leadership ambitions. The main culprits in preparing for the rebellion in Egypt were Muhammad ibn Abi Hudhayfah, Uthman's undutiful stepson, who kept a low profile but was a main plotter, while Al-Ghafiqi was the main public face.

In Shawwal of year 35 H, they prepared to move from Egypt with four battalions made up of around 600 fighters. Each battalion had its commander but Al-Ghafiqi was the overall commander. They pretended that they were traveling to perform the pilgrimage, but when they arrived in Madinah, they began to carry out their conspiracy. Tension was high and the rebels were able to prevent the caliph from leading the congregational prayer in the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah. It was Al-Ghafiqi who led the prayer instead. When Satan was able to persuade them to commit their most serious of crimes and murder the caliph, Al-Ghafiqi was one of the culprits, hitting Uthman with an iron bar he was carrying, and kicking his copy of the Qur'an. After Uthman's assassination, Al-Ghafiqi wielded power in Madinah for five days.

Kinahah ibn Bishr, the second man mentioned by Ibn Al-Arabi belonged to the Tujayb tribe. He was another of those recruited by Abdullah ibn Saba' who was of Jewish origins. The rebels traveled in their four battalions, Kinahah commanding one of them. He was one of the first people to storm Uthman's house, getting in through the adjacent house belonging to Amr ibn Hazm. When he saw Uthman, he stabbed him with a long and narrow blade. As Uthman was reading the Qur'an, some of his blood spilled over the Qur'an. Kinahah was killed three years later in a battle that took place in Egypt between Ali's followers and the army commanded by Amr ibn Al-Aas who supported Mu'awiyah.

Sudan ibn Hamran of Al-Sakoon, a Yemeni tribe some of whose people settled in Egypt, was another commander of the four battalions. When they arrived in Madinah, Muhammad ibn Maslamah, a companion of the Prophet, spoke to them emphasizing the importance of loyalty to Uthman and reminding them that they were accountable before God for the pledge of loyalty to him. Yet Sudan was one of those who stormed the caliph's house and participated in the heinous crime of killing him. Afterward, he came out of the house boasting: "We have killed Uthman ibn Affan."

Abdullah ibn Budayl ibn Warqaa Al-Khuaz'ie was another recruit who fought with his brother Abd Al-Rahman alongside Ali in the Battle of Siffeen, and were killed. His father was an old man when he embraced Islam after the peaceful conquest of Makkah by the Prophet.

Hukaym ibn Jablah of Basrah, whose ancestors belonged to Oman, was apparently a man of courage who sought adventure. Uthman's army attacking India in some daring reconnaissance missions previously used him. Moreover, he used to attack non-Muslim subjects of the Muslim state and

cause damage in their farms. They complained to the caliph about him, and the caliph wrote to his governor in Basrah to restrict his movement inside Basrah, until he showed a responsible attitude. When Abdullah ibn Saba' arrived in Basrah, he was his host. A group of people attended him and he was able to win them over. But then the governor expelled Abdullah ibn Saba'. Therefore, Hukaym continued to recruit people for the rebellion. When the time to march to Madinah arrived a similar number to those marching from Egypt moved out of Basrah, also in four battalions, one of which was under Hukaym's command. He was also one of those who hit Uthman with stones as he addressed them, putting his case. Most of the rebels then left, but Hukaym stayed behind with Al-Ashtar, and they appear to be the ones that forged the letter addressed to the governor of Egypt. Al-Khateeb also mentions that he was the one to start the fighting in the Battle of the Camel, between Ali and his opponents led by Aishah, Talahah and Al-Zubayr. All of them had agreed to meet and negotiate a settlement, but people who were keen that the Muslims should not have a chance to settle their differences started fighting before the meeting could take place, apparently. It is reported that a woman from his own tribe heard him abusing Aishah, the Prophet's wife, and she was angry. She said to him: "You, son of a bad woman, are more deserving of such abuse." He immediately stabbed and killed her. He was executed later in Basrah.

Malik ibn Al-Harith who was known as Al-Ashtar, belonged to the Yemeni tribe of Nakha'. He was a very courageous fighter, and had religious zeal and aspiration for leadership. He played a very active role in the rebellion against Uthman, and was one of its leaders. He then joined Ali and was appointed governor of Egypt, but he died on his way to take up his position. It appears that Ali realized that he could stir trouble easily, and he wanted to foil any attempt at creating trouble within the Muslim state. Hence, his appointment of Al-Ashtar as governor. These were then the leaders of the rebellion against Uthman. We can imagine what sort of following such people would command.



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Uthman's Keen Sense Of Responsibility

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Last week we mentioned that Caliph Uthman did not resort to any measures against his accusers, although he was fully aware that they had nothing to support their claims. When they made their claim concerning a letter, he was absolutely certain that all this was false, because he did not write it. But he did not imprison them or drive them out of the city. He simply asked them to produce their evidence, or accept his oath. There could be no fairer offer. But the rebels had a different objective.

When the rebels who gathered in Madinah for the second time questioned Uthman about the letter claimed to be addressed to his governor in Egypt, requiring him to kill the rebel leaders, he denied all knowledge of it. He asked them to produce two Muslim witnesses or accept his oath that he did not write it. This is the proper law process in such matters under Islamic law. The fact that Uthman was prepared to let the process of law take its course against himself, knowing fully well that his accusers were lying, speaks volumes for his integrity. But Uthman was always a man devoted to the cause of Islam, believed in divine justice and was ready to do everything to spare bloodshed and maintain justice.

Justice Ibn Al-Arabi mentions a report which says that Al-Ashtar, one of the leaders of the rebellion was brought to Uthman. Al-Ashtar said to him: “These people want you either to resign, or to allow yourself to be punished, or they will kill you.” Uthman replied: “As for resigning, I will not leave the Muslim community in a state of chaos. As for retaliation against myself, my two predecessors (meaning Abu Bakr and Umar) did not allow retaliation against themselves. Besides, I am too weak physically.” This report, related by Al-Tabari and Ibn Katheer in their history books, shows Uthman’s keen sense of responsibility. He was facing a rebellion that aimed to kill him, and he could easily have given up, but he chose to stay in office so that the state of chaos could be avoided.

Al-Ashtar speaks of physical punishment. One wonders how dare these people contemplate such a procedure. Who would punish the caliph? And for what? They describe it as retaliation, but they do not specify for what. Uthman only punished those who were proven guilty of committing certain crimes and offenses. He was simply implementing Islamic law. Retaliation in this case is itself a crime. But he was willing to point out that he was physically weak. It was only to be expected since he was around 80. Yet his answer suggests that he could even accept this had it been possible in order to end the troubled situation.

This is certainly true as appears from several other reports. Justice Ibn Al-Arabi quotes a report related in Al-Tamheed by Abu Bakr Al-Baqillani, a leading Shafie scholar, which mentions that “a man said to Uthman that he pledged to God to shed his blood. Uthman offered the man to take his top robe. The man took out his sword and cut the robe in such a way that he made a slight cut in Uthman’s side letting some blood out. He then rode his camel and went away.”

We see Uthman here allowing the man to injure him in order to honor his pledge. Needless to say, he did not have to do that. The man did not have to honor his pledge because what he pledged, which is to kill or cause physical harm to a Muslim, is forbidden in Islam. The Prophet, peace be upon him, makes it clear that a pledge given to God must be honored only if it involves an act of worship, or at least something permissible. If it involves something forbidden, as in this case, then it must not be done. The person making such a pledge should atone for not fulfilling an oath. The atonement is to feed or give some clothes to ten poor persons. If one cannot afford this, then the atonement is to fast three days. So the man making the pledge in this case should have not attempted to act on it. Nevertheless, Uthman helped the man, allowing him to cause him an injury in order to let him go satisfied. Such an action is not normally done by an ordinary person, let alone a caliph who was a very close companion of the Prophet.

Al-Khateeb adds another report which gives a more profound insight into Uthman’s character. “Umayr ibn Dabi’ and Kameel ibn Ziyad Al-Nakha’ie traveled from Kufah to Madinah, aiming to assassinate Uthman, carrying out a collective decision by their group of conspirators. When they were in Madinah, Umayr decided not to go ahead with the plan, leaving Kameel to carry it out on his own. Kameel was watching Uthman’s movements. One day, the two met and Uthman felt that Kameel was up to no good. He pushed him in his face and Kameel fell to the ground. Addressing Uthman by his official title, he said: “You have hurt me.” Uthman said: “Were you not planning to attack me?” He said: “No, by God who is the only deity of the universe.” Some people gathered around them and suggested that they should search Kameel to find out whether he had any weapon. However, Uthman told them not to do so, pointing out that God has spared him any danger, and I do not wish to find out anything other than what he said. I would rather that his statement is true.”

Uthman then sat on the ground and said to Kameel: "If the matter is as you have said, then do to me as I did to you, because I would not have harmed you except for the fact that I thought you wanted to assault me. But if you are saying the truth, may God give you ample reward, and if you are a liar, then may God humiliate you. Now take your revenge." Kameel said that he did not wish to do so.

Here we see Uthman's noble character. He did not wish to do any injustice to anyone. When he thought the man was about to attack him, he pushed him aside. When the man swore by God that he had no such intention, the caliph sat down and invited him to retaliate for the push that caused him to fall. There can be no more generous or virtuous character than Uthman's, the third caliph about whom the Prophet said: "Uthman puts the angels to shame." What he meant was that Uthman was so devoted, unassuming and humble that the angels feel too shy in his presence.

This was Uthman's attitude toward those rebels who were keen to kill him. The question that may be asked here is whether it would have been wiser for Uthman to resign or retire, as that could have spared the Muslim community much trouble. We will try to answer this question next week, God willing.

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Why Caliph Uthman Didn't Resign

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With the rebels gathering in Madinah and assassins waiting in ambush, Uthman tried hard to find a way out of the problem. However, being too caring and compassionate, he did not want to trouble anyone with what he felt to be aimed at him personally. He realized that the rebels wanted to get him in person. He might have wished to have a regular army stationed near to home, so that the capital city of the Muslim world could be defended. But this was not the case. Indeed, Mu'awiyah, his governor in Syria, offered to send him a strong army, but he declined. He did not want an army to come from a distant area to exhaust the supplies available in Madinah, thus causing its people much inconvenience. We see how caring he was.

When he did that, he perhaps thought it inconceivable that any group of protesters could go as far as killing one of the Prophet's main companions, who also happened to be the caliph. But the situation was not easing at all. On the contrary, the rebels were becoming more and more intransigent, despite the clarifications he gave them. These clarifications, as we have seen over the last few weeks, would have convinced even the most aggrieved party of the soundness of the caliph's position. But the conspirators who managed to raise such a force of deceived people were intent on causing maximum damage to the Islamic state.

Uthman soon realized that the rebels would not be appeased, no matter how hard he tried. He was keen not to spill blood, and not to allow the situation to reach the stage of fighting. Therefore, he thought that it was his responsibility to defuse the situation. Justice Ibn Al-Arabi reports that Abdullah ibn Umar, a leading scholar of the Prophet's companions, visited Uthman who said to him: "These people are demanding that I resign or they would kill me." Ibn Umar said: "Are you immortal? Can these people do anything more than killing you?" When Uthman answered in the negative, Ibn Umar asked him: "Can they determine whether you go to heaven or hell?" Again Uthman answered in the negative. Ibn Umar said: "Then do not take off a garment God has given you, so that you do not set a precedent allowing any group of people to remove their ruler or kill him whenever they disliked him."

"Indeed Uthman addressed the rebels from a platform and quoted them several Hadiths in which the Prophet commended his actions, particularly those concerning the building of the Prophet's mosque in Madinah and the digging of the Roomah well, which provided drinking water for the inhabitants of Madinah. He also quoted them what the Prophet said when Mount Uhud quaked while they stood over it. They confirmed their knowledge of all these Hadiths."

Ibn Umar's advice echoed the Prophet's own advice to Uthman, using practically the same words, which confirms that Ibn Umar was aware of that earlier advice. Aishah, the Prophet's wife, reports that the Prophet said: "Uthman, if one day God assigns to you the position of ruler and some hypocrites try to get you to remove the garment God has given you, then do not do so." He repeated this three times. This Hadith is related by Ibn Majah and also by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, though in different wording.

The Hadiths quoted by Uthman show that the Prophet was always pleased with Uthman. Indeed, the Prophet loved Uthman and appreciated his qualities. Nothing could show this better than the fact that Uthman married two of the Prophet's daughters, marrying the second after the first one had died. But he was also ready with generous donations whenever the Muslim state was in need of funds. The two examples given by Ibn Al-Arabi relate to the building and expansion of the Prophet's mosque in Madinah and the provision of drinking water. But Uthman was regularly making generous donations, the best known of which was his provision of 300 fully equipped camels for the Tabuk military expedition.

Mount Uhud, which is close to Madinah, quaked, perhaps as in an earthquake, when the Prophet, Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman stood over it. The Prophet struck the mountain with his foot and said: "Be firm, Mount Uhud. The only people you are carrying are a prophet, a siddiq, i.e. a believer of unshakable faith, and two martyrs. Needless to say that the siddiq was Abu Bakr who was known by this title even during the Prophet's lifetime. In fact it was the Prophet who gave him this title. Hence, the other two were the martyrs, and these were none other than Umar and Uthman. The latter knew that Umar was assassinated while he was praying. Hence, he was aware that he was most likely to meet the same fate.

Any ruler facing the prospect of assassination but still enjoying much popularity would try to suppress the rebellion by force. But not Uthman. He appealed to God in this way: "My Lord, they have denied my favors and marred my benevolent actions. Make them never satisfied with their

leader and let no leader be satisfied with them.” He then made his decision and carried it out immediately, as explained by Justice Ibn Al-Arabi: “Abdullah ibn Amir ibn Rabeeah reports: ‘I was with Uthman in his home when he said: I command everyone here who believes that he should obey my orders to stay his hand and to put down his weapon.” He then addressed Abdullah ibn Umar who was holding his sword, saying: Go out and inform the people of my order. So Abdullah ibn Umar and Al-Hasan ibn Ali went out and the rebels stormed the house and killed Uthman.”

What this tells us about Uthman’s attitude is that he was keen to prevent any bloodshed. He felt that if the people who were close to him, and inside his home, were to defend him against the rebels, there was bound to be much bloodshed. He decided to prevent all that, by leaving the possibility of bloodshed limited to him, knowing fully well that he was bound to be a martyr, because the Hadith we have already quoted was certain to come true, as did every word the Prophet had said. We will explain this further next week, God willing.

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How Uthman Tried To Avoid Bloodshed

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As we mentioned last week, when Uthman felt that it was inevitable that the rebels besieging his home were bound to try to storm it, he ordered those who were inside, ready to defend him, to lay down their arms and go home. There are several reports that confirm Uthman's decision not to be defended. Ibn Al-Arabi mentions a few:

“Zayd ibn Thabit came in and said to Uthman: The Ansar are here saying: ‘We are willing to be God’s supporters again.’ Uthman said: ‘I have no need for this. Stay your hands.’” Abu Hurayrah said to Uthman: “Today, the best action is to fight alongside you.” Uthman replied: “I insist that you should leave.”

“Al-Hasan ibn Ali was the last to depart. Earlier, Al-Hasan and Al-Husayn, the Prophet’s grandsons, as well as Ibn Umar, Abdullah ibn Al-Zubayr and Marwan ibn Al-Hakam came in to defend him. However, he insisted that all of them should put down their swords, leave and go home. Both Ibn Al-Zubayr and Marwan said to him: ‘But we insist to stay.’ He then opened the door himself and the rebels stormed in. The black man then killed him.

“It is reported that Ibn Abi Bakr held him by his beard while Kinanah slew him. Another report mentions that his killer was a man from Egypt nicknamed Himar, which means donkey. A drop of his blood fell over his copy of the Qur’an which he was reading sticking next to the phrase that says: ‘God will stop them for you.’ (This is in verse 137 of Surah 2) That blood stain was not removed.”

This shows that Uthman enjoyed the support of the Prophet’s companions a majority of whom were still living in Madinah. Indeed some of them, like Al-Zubayr ibn Al-Awwam, were looking for the best way to support the caliph. Musa ibn Uqbah, the historian of the early period of Islam, reports: “When Uthman was besieged in his home, the Amr ibn Awf clan, which was a large branch of the Khazraj, one of the two major tribes of the Ansar, sent a message to Al-Zubayr that they would be joining him en masse so that he would be their commander in defending Uthman. He was pleased with this and sent someone called Abu Habeebah with a message to Uthman saying: ‘Your brother Al-Zubayr sends you his greetings and wishes to know if you prefer that he should come immediately to help defending you, staying with you in your home and sharing with the people there their fate, or would you rather that he should wait for the Amr ibn Awf clan and come in force to defend you.’”

Abu Habeebah reports: “When I entered Uthman’s house, I found him seated on a chair and there were sheets and cushions. I also found there Al-Hasan ibn Ali, the Prophet’s grandson, Abdullah ibn Umar, Abu Hurayrah, Saeed ibn Al-Aas, Marwan ibn Al-Hakam and Abdullah ibn Al-Zubayr. I delivered Al-Zubayr’s message. In reply, Uthman said to me to tell him: “If you were to come and join me, you will be one extra man with us, increasing our defense by one. I would rather you wait for the Amr ibn Awf clan and come with them. It may be that God would give us protection through you.” Abu Hurayrah stood up and said: “Listen all of you. I heard with my ears God’s messenger saying: ‘There will be strife and troubles after me.’ I asked him how could one avoid being involved and the Prophet said: ‘By being on the side of the ruler and his party.’ As Abu Hurayrah said this, he pointed to Uthman.

“On hearing Abu Hurayrah saying this, all the people present said to Uthman: ‘Give us permission to fight, for the issues are clear to us.’ He said: ‘I insist that everyone who knows that he must obey my orders should not fight.’ However, the rebels attacked before the Amr ibn Awf clan arrived and they killed Uthman.”

In his annotation of Ibn Al-Arabi’s book, Al-Khateeb explains that the man who slew Uthman was Kinanah ibn Bishr Al-Tujaybi, the commander of one of the four Egyptian battalions.

He was the first of those who stormed Uthman’s house, carrying a flame and intent on burning the door to open it. He took out his sword to hit the caliph, but his wife, Nailah, tried to defend him, and Kinanah chopped off her hands before putting his sword on Uthman’s chest and leaning with all his weight over him. This man was killed two years later in the battle that took place in Egypt between Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr and Amr ibn Al-Aas.

As for the man reported to have killed him, whose nickname is Himar which means donkey, Al-Khateeb says that no one among the perpetrators of this heinous crime is known by this name, which seems to be misspelled.

Now that we know how Uthman was killed, it is important to gauge what the Prophet's companions felt after his killing. Perhaps the statement that sums up their feelings is that of Aishah, the Prophet's wife. On her return to Madinah after her pilgrimage, many people gathered around her and she delivered a powerful speech which she concluded by saying: "I was angry when a whip was used against some of you; would I not be angry that Uthman should be hit with a sword! You have remonstrated with him until he was like the purified juice of a sugar cane, or a slate wiped clean, or a robe without a single stain. Nevertheless, you killed him!"

Masrooq, a leading scholar of the second generation of Muslims, said to her: "This was the result of your own action. You sent letters calling on people to revolt against him."

She said: "By God who is acknowledged by all believers and denied by unbelievers I have never blackened a white sheet with anything of the sort." In comment, Al-Aamash, a renowned scholar, says that the general feeling was that such letters were forged and attributed to her.

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Caliph Uthman Provided A Good Role Model

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There is no doubt that the troubles that led to the assassination of Uthman, the third caliph, in his home in Madinah were perpetrated by a group of conspirators who were able to raise a force of 2,000 men whom they deceived into thinking that they were supporting the truth.

We have also shown that Uthman was aware that the rebels were intent on killing him. They would stop at nothing. Yet he ordered that no one should defend him. He in fact forced those who were at his home ready to defend him to leave and not to fight the rebels. He would probably have welcomed being defended by a large force which would be more than a match to the rebels. He might have thought that the presence of such a force would stay the hands of the rebels and they would refrain from attacking. This appears clearly from his reaction to the message Al-Zubayr sent him that the Amr ibn Awf clan of the Ansar who were ready to defend him would join him. But the rebels forestalled that by storming into his home and killing him before such support arrived.

We should mention here that this clan and Al-Zubayr were taking action on their own initiative. Uthman did not seek support from anyone. Hence, it is pertinent to quote what Ibn Al-Arabi mentions here: "It is clear that none of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) companions joined any conspiracy against Uthman, nor refrained from supporting him. Had Uthman sought support, the

rebel forces, whether they were one or four thousand men, coming from far away places could not have defeated 20,000 or more local people who would have hurried to support him. But he decided to take it all upon himself in a sublime act of self-sacrifice.”

Al-Khateeb comments: “Uthman chose the lesser evil which was to sacrifice his own life. He saw that the alternative would widen the division within the Muslim community and lead to much more bloodshed. Hence he thought that his sacrifice would spare Islam further trouble. Unfortunately, most of us do not appreciate his sacrifice.”

Ibn Al-Arabi points out that scholars are of conflicting views with regard to the proper action that should be taken in such a situation. If anyone finds himself in a position like that of Uthman, should he seek support or follow Uthman’s example, sacrificing himself? Ibn Al-Arabi is of the latter view as he mentions what happened to him and what he chose to do. He says: “I have been a judge administering justice between people. I enforced the obligatory prayers, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong and unjust to the extent that no one could see anything wrong being committed. This angered those who were keen to resort to injustice. Transgressors felt the situation too hard for them because they could no longer transgress. Therefore, they gathered against me. I surrendered myself to God, and ordered all those who were willing to support me and defend me in my home not to do so. I went up to the roof, and my attackers stormed in. By the evening my home was overtaken. Had it not been for my good reputation on account of what I did in the past, I would have been killed in my home. My reason for adopting this stance was threefold: The first is to act on the Prophet’s advice, and the second to follow Uthman’s example, and the last is to spare myself what people might say against me, knowing that the Prophet who was supported by revelations tried hard to avoid. I feared that people who could not be with me, and indeed some of my adversaries who were present, would say that people came to me appealing for help and I caused them to be killed.

“Besides, all that Uthman did is considered an example to be followed, as he provided a good role model. He was certain that he would be killed, since the Prophet told him of that, and he gave him the happy news that he would be in heaven after he had had some trouble to endure, and also told him that he would be a martyr. It is further reported that Uthman saw the Prophet in his dream who told him: ‘If you wish, you could have support to overcome them, or you may choose to end your fast tonight with us.’

“Some ignorant people claim that everyone of the leading figures among the Prophet’s companions was urging the rebels against Uthman, and that they were happy with what happened to him. They fabricated a letter of fine style and rich with quotations, purported to having been sent by Uthman to Ali seeking support. But all this is false, aiming to make later generations of Muslims unhappy with its first generation and with the rightly-guided caliphs.”

Thus Ibn Al-Arabi endorses Uthman’s attitude of sacrificing himself in order to prevent further bloodshed. When he was attacked by the mob that was unhappy with his keen sense of justice, he was ready to sacrifice himself in the same way as Uthman. As for his reference to the Prophet’s trying to evade what people may say against him, this was when Abdullah ibn Ubayy, the chief of the

hypocrites in Madinah, said a mouthful, threatening to drive the Prophet out of Madinah on his return there. Umar wanted to kill him, but the Prophet stopped him saying: “It will not be said that Muhammad kills his followers.”

Ibn Al-Arabi then sums up the real situation as follows: “What is deduced from all that we have mentioned is that Uthman was unjustly killed and that he had no case to answer. All the Prophet’s companions have nothing to answer for on the question of not giving him enough support. They simply did what he expressly wished them to do. They agreed that he could choose to surrender himself to his attackers. In addition, it has been authentically reported that Abdullah ibn Al-Zubayr said to Uthman: ‘We are here with you a small group who are fully aware of the truth, and God may grant victory to a smaller number than us. Permit us to fight them.’ Uthman said: ‘I remind anyone who spills blood for my sake that he will have to account for it before God.’

“Saleet said: ‘Uthman warned us against fighting them. Had he permitted us, we would have fought them until we have driven them out of Madinah.’ Abdullah ibn Amir ibn Rabeeah said: ‘I was with Uthman in his home, but he said to us: I insist that everyone who acknowledges that he should obey me to stay his hand. The one of you who will be most effective is the one who stays his hand.’

“It has been authentically reported that Al-Hasan and Al-Husain (the Prophet’s grandsons) as well as Ibn Al-Zubayr, Ibn Umar and Marwan were all inside his home carrying their weapons. Uthman said to them: “I insist that everyone of you puts down his weapon and go back home.”

Al-Khateeb adds several other reports confirming this and showing that Uthman had the support that would have ensured that the rebels could be defeated. But he chose to spare the Muslim community any bloodshed, leaving himself to be the only casualty.



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Ali's Troubled Reign

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The discussion of the troubles leading to the assassination of Uthman, the third Caliph, who was a most trusted and loved companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him), has been lengthy, because the events were confused and the reports recording them suffer from addition and fabrication. We attempted to provide the most accurate picture, relying on the most accurate reports and rejecting what could not be properly supported even though it might have been widely held.

When studying history, we must always be careful, accepting only what is seen to be reliable. We must not forget that interested parties always resort to fabrication. However one of their preferred methods is to add false details to a true, but general, account so that their lies may be accepted.

We should always remember that the last few years of Uthman's reign, the entire period of Ali's rule and the first couple of years of Mu'awiyah's reign make up a very troubled period in Islamic history, when fabrication, in different methods, was rife. Hence, reports must be read very carefully. It is always easy to give a report an authentic color by mentioning a couple of well known facts, and then add some false details. When this is done with several reports, they tend to confirm other false allegations.

Historians of merit, therefore, do not take reports at face value. They check and compare so that they are able to provide a more accurate picture.

Needless to say, Ali assumed power in the Muslim state at a very difficult time. His integrity and sense of justice could not be faulted. He was the Prophet's trusted companion, cousin and son-in-law. His knowledge of Islam was of the highest standards, as confirmed by the Prophet himself. He had no personal interest other than the service of Islam.

When he took over the reigns of government, his first preoccupation was to try to make things settle down. But he was struggling against heavy odds. To doubt his intentions is a grave error. Yet there were some who would accuse him and other trusted companions of the Prophet of involvement in political intrigue.

To steer a clear course in the midst of false reports and accusations, we rely once more on Justice Abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi, who first mentions the accusations before replying to them. We will also make use of Al-Khateeb's annotation of Ibn Al-Arabi's book for more details and authentic reports. Ibn Al-Arabi reports:

"Some people allege that when Ali's election was completed, Talhah and Al-Zubayr asked him permission to travel to Makkah. He said to them: 'It may be that you want to travel to Basrah or Syria.' They swore that they would not do so. At the time Aishah was in Makkah. Moreover, Abdullah ibn Amir, Uthman's governor of Basrah and Ya'la ibn Umayyah, his governor of Yemen also fled to Makkah. So all of them and Marwan ibn Al-Hakam gathered in Makkah, where they met members of the Umayyad clan. They were keen on the need to avenge Uthman's killing.

Ya'la ibn Umayyah gave Talhah and Al-Zubayr 400,000 dirhams, (the silver currency at the time), and gave Aishah a camel which he bought in Yemen for 200 dinars, (the gold currency at the time). They wanted to travel to Syria, but Abdullah ibn Amir counseled them otherwise. He said: 'You have no business with Mu'awiyah. On my part, I have supporters in Basrah, so let us aim there.'

"As they marched, they passed by a well named Al-Haw'ab, where dogs were barking. Aishah inquired about the place, and when she was told its name, she turned her camel back because she remembered the Prophet saying to his wives: 'Which one of you will have the hairy-faced camel, and will be barked at by the dogs of Al-Haw'ab.' Talahah and Al-Zubayr asserted to her that it was not the Al-Haw'ab well, and so did fifty of their men. This was the first perjury in Islam."

There are numerous inaccuracies in this report which aims to show that leading figures among the Prophet's companions were conspiring to force Ali's hand or to organize opposition to him. In his footnotes on the book, Muhibb Al-Din Al-Khateeb mentions that several of the Prophet's companions sought Ali's permission to go to Makkah. Among them was Abdullah ibn Umar, an authoritative scholar and a companion of the Prophet.

The reason for such travel was that Ali was contemplating a fight against the people of Syria, who were under Mu'awiyah. He asked the people of Madinah to support him, but they counseled him against marching forth. Ali asked Abdullah ibn Umar for support, but he said to him: "I am only one

man from Madinah. If the people of Madinah will march forth, I will do so in obedience to you. But I am not contemplating going out to fight this year.” He then prepared himself and departed for Makkah. We will further see that Al-Hasan ibn Ali was opposed to his father’s idea of marching against the people of Syria, or departing Madinah.

Al-Khateeb explains Aishah’s presence in Makkah, saying that when the rebels cut off water supplies to Uthman’s home, he sought people’s help in getting water. Umm Habeebah, a wife of the Prophet, came forward with a supply of water carried on a mule. The rebels insulted her and hit her mule on its face, cutting its rope with a sword. Such an insult to one of the Prophet’s wives described in the Qur’an as “mothers of the believers” was a flagrant aggression that respected no value. Hence, the Prophet’s wives got ready and traveled to Makkah to offer the pilgrimage.

Furthermore, the report accuses two of the leading companions of the Prophet of deliberate lies. Firstly it claims that both Talhah and Al-Zubayr swore to Ali that they would not go to Basrah or Syria, but they did. It also alleges that they deceived Aishah swearing that the well they were at was not that of Al-Haw’ab, when it actually was. Both allegations are false. To start with, we have to remember that Talhah and Al-Zubayr were among the very early Muslims. They embraced Islam shortly after Abu Bakr, perhaps in its first week. At the time, they were young men in their teens. They learned Islamic values directly from the Prophet and were keen to implement them in practice. They supported the Prophet through every difficulty and they were model defenders of Islam. They were peerless in their dedication to the cause of Islam.

The Prophet loved them both and stated more than once that he was pleased with their conduct. He further mentioned on a special occasion that they would be in heaven, including them among his top ten companions.

Their conduct under the first three Caliphs was also faultless. They always upheld the values of Islam. As they were certainly aware of how abhorrent lying is considered in Islam, it is inconceivable that they would tell a deliberate lie. But this report makes such an accusation without providing any evidence.

Hence, it must be rejected out of hand. Besides, the Hadith claimed to be said by the Prophet and mentioned in this report is also false. The whole thing is a blatant lie against people of the highest caliber. It must be rejected as a lie. We will be discussing this further later on.

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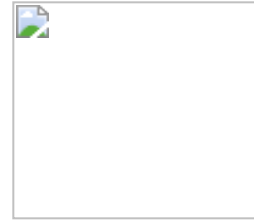
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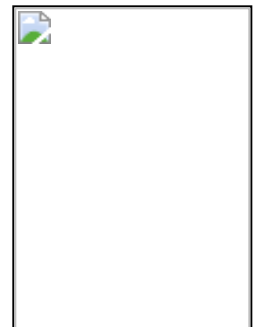
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Earth, a planet hungry for peace



The Israeli apartheid (security) wall around Palestinian population centers (Ran Cohen, pmc, 5/24/03).



The Israeli apartheid (security) wall around Palestinian population centers in the West Bank, like a Python. (Alquds, 10/25/03).

Fighting During Ali's Reign

Adil Salahi

Arab News, 3/8/04

Justice Abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi moves on to discuss the Battle of Siffeen, which witnessed another episode of fighting between Muslims, many of whom belonged to the generation of the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The battle was between Ali, the fourth caliph, moving from Kufah in Iraq, and Muawiyah, the governor of Syria, moving from Damascus. The two sides met at Siffeen, close to the town of Raqqah, on the Euphrates inside Syria. This means that the two armies moved along the fertile and populated area, rather than crossing the Syrian Desert, which would have been the direct route had it been easy to cross.

There are numerous misconceptions about this battle and the attitude of the two sides. In his scholarly and concise manner, Ibn Al-Arabi sums up first the false reports and accusations before refuting them. His summing up of the false statements goes as follows: "War broke out between the people from Syria and those from Iraq. The latter called for a unanimous pledge of loyalty to Ali as Imam and caliph, while the Syrian side were demanding that Uthman's killers must be punished without delay. In their position they maintained that they would not pledge loyalty to the killers.

"Ali said that he would not surrender any person to anyone for punishment unless judgment had been

attractions

passed on that person. Mu'awiyah, on the other hand, maintained that he 'cannot pledge allegiance to an accused person or a killer. He is one of those to be questioned: how can we make him judge or give him our allegiance? As a caliph, he has been in the wrong.'

"They added too many details which led to forging letters, coining statements, composing poetry and coming up with proverbs, all of which are at variance with the conduct of the early generations. Yet these are approved only by the wicked and rejected by honest people."

Al-Khateeb gives us some details of the background to this encounter, stating that after the Battle of the Camel, between Ali and the group led by Aishah, Ali moved from Basrah to Kufah, which he reached on Monday, Rajab 12, in year 36. He then sent Jareer ibn Abdullah Al-Bujali to Damascus, with a message to Muawiyah calling on him to declare his subordination to him as caliph. Muawiyah called a meeting of the main figures, including a number of the Prophet's companions, army commanders and leading personalities from Syria to consult them. Their agreed view was that they would not pledge allegiance to Ali unless he punishes Uthman's killers or hand them over to them. Jareer went back to Ali with this answer.

Ali then appointed Uqbah ibn Amir as his deputy in Kufah and marched at the head of his army and encamped at Al-Nukhaylah, which is at the beginning of his route from Iraq to Syria, where his forces gathered. Some of his advisers suggested that he should stay in Kufah, sending some other commander to meet the Syrians, but he refused. When Muawiyah heard that Ali got ready and marched at the head of his army, his advisers suggested that he, too, should be at the head of his forces. Thus, the Syrians moved toward the Euphrates aiming for Siffeen, and Ali moved toward the same area. Both marched toward the end of the month of Dul Qaada. When the two armies met, clashes started in the month of Dul Hijjah, 36 H. In the following month, Muharram 37 H, there was a truce between the two parties, then fighting broke out again. Then they both agreed arbitration on Safar 13, 37 H, which is the following month, making clear that the two arbiters were to declare their agreed verdict in Ramadan of that year at a place called Dooamat Al-Jandal in the north of the Arabian Peninsula.

Ibn Al-Arabi then begins his refutation of these accusations by acknowledging that the war between the two sides was over this particular issue. He then comes clearly on Ali's side, saying that his attitude was



right, because a person who claims justice against killers cannot be the one who judges in the matter. What he means is that since Muawiyah and his side demanded that justice should be done with regard to Uthman's killing, they could not be given the killers to pass judgment on them. This was to be left to the caliph as he was the highest judge.

Ibn Al-Arabi further adds that if the claimant of justice accuses the judge of taking sides, he is not justified in staging a rebellion against him. The proper attitude is to demand that he should administer justice. If it is done, then well and good. If not, the claimant should accept the situation with resignation. Many are the cases that are judged only by God. If the judge taking sides is one who does not follow the dictates of religion, then in this case the claimant may have an excuse if he rebels.

It is a precise statement, well considered by an author who was a judge of high calibre. To Ibn Al-Arabi, the case is clear. Ali was the caliph and he could judge the situation. Those who claimed justice for Uthman could press their claim with him. It is his responsibility to look into the matter. If he did not, this is not a cause to justify rebellion against him.

Al-Khateeb explains that the problem arose because the leaders of the rebellion that led to Uthman's assassination joined Ali's camp. He gives the example of Al-Ashtar whom he describes as the leading trouble-maker who caused war between the two camps. Al-Khateeb shows that the demand made by Muawiyah and other companions of the Prophet was justified. However, he explains that when Uthman's assassins who joined Ali were in Iraq, they were actually in their power base. Had he put them to trial there and executed them, he might have opened the floodgate for more trouble. Hence, he needed to let matters cool down and his authority to be well established first, then he would have dealt with the matter.

Al-Khateeb also mentions that Al-Hasan, Ali's eldest son, was against his father's departure from Madinah to Kufah, because he feared that trouble might arise with the people in Syria, who were in the forefront of the defense of the Islamic state. Had Ali followed Al-Hasan's advice, Muawiyah would not have taken any action against him, Al-Khateeb claims.

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Dispute Over Uthman's Killers

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In his refutation of the false accusation that Ali was lenient toward Uthman's killers, Justice Abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi outlines all possibilities, even the most remote ones, and explains the right attitude in each case. He says:

“If an accusation of participation in Uthman's assassination were to be leveled at Ali, then every companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in Madinah at the time could be similarly accused of, or we may even say actually took part in, killing him. The point here is that if one thousand people came to Madinah to kill Uthman, they would be no match to 40,000 people in Madinah.

“Even if it is hypothetically argued that Ali, Talhah and Al-Zubayr colluded in Uthman's assassination, the question that needs an answer is about the attitude of the rest of the Prophet's companions who belonged to the Muhajireen and the Ansar, as well as those who were supporting them: why had they all fallen short of helping and defending him?

“The possible explanations here are 1) that they thought that the rebels against Uthman were out for what was right and justified. This would be a judgment against Uthman. In such a situation the Syrians would have had no case. 2) It could be said that they simply did not care about what might

have happened, and that it did not matter to them in the least what long-term effects it might have had on Islam.

If so, then this is a case of apostasy, not mere disobedience of God's orders. For, complacency concerning the faith and carelessness about fundamental Islamic principles are tantamount to total disbelief. 3) They might have refrained from defending Uthman because they felt that they could not disobey his clear and express order. In this case, what blame could be laid at their doorstep? What other argument could be said for Marwan when Abdullah ibn Al-Zubayr, Al-Hasan, Al-Husain, Abdullah ibn Umar and the other prominent figures were with Uthman in his home, going in and out fully armed, in full view of the rebels? Had the rebels felt powerful enough, they would not have let any of these see Uthman or visit him. They could do nothing but watch as these went in and out. Had Al-Hasan, Al-Husain, Abdullah ibn Umar and Abdullah ibn Al-Zubayr confronted them, they would not have dared to oppose them. Had they killed them, none of the rebels would have remained alive.

“The fact is that Uthman decided to surrender himself, and they left him to his decision. This is a matter of personal discretion, as we have already explained.”

Here we see Ibn Al-Arabi analyzing the situation that took place at the time of Uthman's assassination, to determine the motives of the Prophet's companions in Madinah and their attitude at the time when the crisis reached its climax. He even speaks about the possibility of the great figures among the Prophet's companions, such as Ali, Talhah and Al-Zubayr, being involved in the assassination. It is important to remember that no Sunni Muslim has ever suggested even remotely that there is even a tiny shred of evidence to support such a hypothesis. Yet Ibn Al-Arabi mentions it in order to refute it. Had there been any possibility that this was the case the rest of the Prophet's companions would not have left the matter without enforcing the Islamic law against them.

He then speaks about the attitude of the people of Madinah who could have defended Uthman, stating the three possibilities behind their attitude and concluding that they simply acted on Uthman's orders who expressly demanded that they should not put up any fight on his behalf. The point here is that Uthman felt that by sacrificing his own life, he would spare the Muslim community much greater trouble.

Ibn Al-Arabi further explains Ali's attitude:

“What would have been Ali's attitude, after he had been chosen as caliph and people pledged allegiance to him, had Uthman's relatives come to him and said: “One thousand people have all conspired together and killed Uthman, and all of them can be identified?” He could not have said anything other than to demand proof and to promise satisfaction. It would have not required more than one day to prove who killed Uthman.

He would then have acted on that and administered justice, inflicting the proper punishment, unless they could have proved that Uthman perpetrated something that made him liable to the death penalty.

“All Muslims know that no violation of any law could have been proven against Uthman. Had such demands been made, coupled with the required proof, the case would have been far more easily adjudicated and the desired result would have been easier to achieve.

“What totally clarifies the issue is that when Muawiyah became the caliph, he could only punish Uthman’s assassins through the legal process, with the exception of those who were killed in fighting, or those who were said to be given away.

This continued to be the case until Al-Hajjaj became governor. Throughout this time they were killed on the basis of accusation, not solid proof. This means that those who demanded justice in the case of Uthman’s assassination could not do, when they were in power, what they demanded from Ali.”

In his explanation, Ibn Al-Arabi admits that the proof against Uthman’s assassins was available, because the crime was committed in full daylight, and the perpetrators did not hide their involvement. However, it was very difficult to put them to account, and by whom, when they were practically in control of Madinah. Indeed, had Ali attempted to put those people to justice, they might have killed him and landed the Muslim community in greater trouble. They surely discussed the possibility when they were in consultation at Dhi Qar, after he had made a speech denouncing the troublemakers. Al-Ashtar, for example, was in a rebellious mood when Ali appointed his cousin Abdullah ibn Abbas as governor of Basra, while he coveted that post himself. Al-Ashtar decided to leave Ali, but Ali caught up with him to forestall any attempt he could make to stir further trouble.



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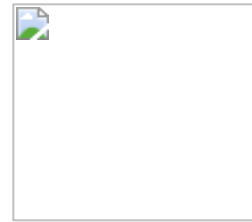
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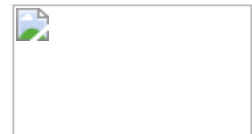
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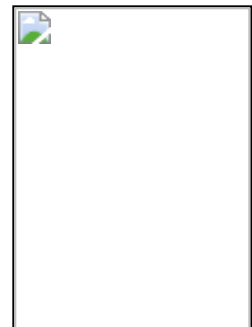
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Uthman's Martyrdom and the Verdict on Ali's Status

Adil Salahi

Arab News, 3/22/04

Continuing his refutation of what is falsely attributed to Ali concerning his alleged refusal to put Uthman's killers to justice, Ibn Al-Arabi makes clear that although Ali would have loved to bring to justice all those who participated in murdering Uthman, that was impossible in the circumstances. He mentions that when Mu'awiyah became caliph, he could not do so either. He then says:

"What will be especially pleasing to you, Muslims, is that the Prophet (peace be upon him) referred to such troubles, making clear indications. He warned about Al-Khawarij, who would rebel against Ali after having served in his army. Referring to them, he said: 'A splinter group will break away from a Muslim party, and they will be killed by the party that is closer to the truth.' (Related by Muslim). This means that both parties try to uphold the truth, but Ali's party are closer to it. God says in the Qur'an: 'If two groups of believers fall to fighting, make peace between them. But then, if one of the two goes on acting wrongfully toward the other, fight against the one that acts wrongfully until it reverts to God's commandment; and if they revert, make peace between them with justice, and deal equitably with them. Indeed, God loves those who act equitably.' (49: 9) Thus, God did not deprive the other party of being believers on grounds of their stand against the caliph which they would take on the basis of their

attractions

understanding. Nor did He deprive them of being brothers to their fellow Muslims, as He says in the following verse: 'All believers are but brothers. Hence, make peace between your two brothers.' (49: 10)

"Referring to Ammar, the Prophet says: 'He will be killed by the party in the wrong.' The Prophet also pointed to his grandson, Al-Hasan, and said: 'This son of mine is a leader. Through him God may bring about peace between two great Muslim groups.' This was a hint to Al-Hasan that encouraged him to renounce any claim to the post of caliph in order to bring about peace within the Muslim community. It is also reported that the Prophet permitted Uthman, in a dream, to surrender himself and break his fast with the Prophet.

"All these matters were subject to contention. Every attitude adopted by either party could rely on sound basis, which means that they were all within the domain of what may be subject to discretion based on scholarly insight. Such discretion, or ijtihad, earns a single reward for a person adopting the wrong conclusion, while the one choosing the right option receives a reward multiplied ten times.

"Whatever reports you read in books of history that are at variance with what we have mentioned are all false and should be utterly discounted."

Al-Khateeb has much to add by way of explaining what Ibn Al-Arabi says. In reference to the two parties trying to uphold the truth, Al-Khateeb says that the Sunni Muslims believe that Ali and Mu'awiyah, and those companions of the Prophet who were with either side, were all people who sincerely advocated the truth. Their disagreement was simply based on genuine discretion, as happens in a countless number of cases. Because they held their views and took their stands on the basis of sincerely made effort to arrive at the truth, they would earn reward from God, whether they were right or wrong. Those who were right would get far greater reward, but the mistaken ones will also be rewarded. It should be remembered that only the Prophet was infallible. Other people are liable to err, and they may err at times and be right at others.

An exception must be made here, as Al-Khateeb says, in the case of the rebels against Uthman, including those of them who subsequently joined either one of the two parties and committed themselves to supporting it by fighting its battles. These were liable to punishment under Islamic law. If the caliph could not do that, their offence remained as heinous as ever. Moreover, the leading figures among them continued to stir up conflict among Muslims, whenever they felt that



they were about to mend their differences and unite. What must be stressed here is that only those of the Prophet's companions who were in both parties, and those following their lead, were the ones who strove for the truth. These are the ones who earn a reward from God, whether they were right or wrong.

Al-Khateeb further explains that it is acknowledged by all Sunni Muslims that Ali, whom the Prophet included in the ten of his companions assured of going to heaven, was in a better position with God than Mu'awiyah, who also was a companion of the Prophet. Both were noble people. A group of wicked people joined either one or the other, but then everyone will have their deserts as God determines in His unfailing justice.

Commenting on the Hadith concerning Ammar ibn Yasir and that he would be killed by "the party in the wrong," Al-Khateeb mentions that the Prophet said this to him as he was taking part in the digging of the moat around Madinah as a barrier to prevent the attacking forces from entering it. While everyone carried one brick at a time, Ammar carried two. The Prophet said this to him, indicating that Ammar would always be supporting the right cause.

Yet Mu'awiyah was not staging a rebellion when he marched to Siffeen. He neither started the fight with Ali nor wanted it. He only marched after he learnt that Ali was marching toward him. Hence, Mu'awiyah said of Ammar: "It was the ones who brought him out to fight that killed him."

Al-Khateeb maintains that all those killed in the troubles which started against Uthman were primarily killed by those rebels who continued to stir up trouble right until they caused the assassination of Ali himself.

The Hadith speaking of Al-Hasan, the Prophet's grandson, being instrumental in making peace between two large groups of Muslims was fulfilled. After Ali's assassination, Al-Hasan was chosen as leader and caliph by the party that supported his father. Within a few months, he relinquished the post, leaving it to Mu'awiyah, which meant the end of the internal conflict within the Muslim community.

Ibn Al-Arabi also refers to Uthman's dream in the last night of his life, when he saw the Prophet saying to him that he could choose either to be supported against the rebels or to surrender himself. Uthman chose the latter, insisting that those who were staying in his home to guard him should leave.

They did as he bid them, a move which tempted the rebels and they stormed his home and killed him. Thus Uthman preferred to sacrifice himself, believing that this would prevent further bloodshed among Muslims.

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The Arbitration On Ali's Dispute

Author:

Edited by Adil Salahi

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The story of arbitration between Ali and Mu'awiyah is often cited as one of cunning and scheming on one side and sheer naivety on the other. We quoted last week Justice Ibn Al-Arabi's refutation of this story which he describes as blatant lies and false fabrication. In fact, the story does not stand to any careful examination. To sum it up, Amr ibn Al-Aas, the arbiter from Mu'awiyah's side, is said to have tricked his counterpart Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari to announce the removal from office of both Ali and Mu'awiyah. When he did, and it was Amr's turn to speak, he confirmed the removal of Ali but declared that Mu'awiyah remains firmly in office.

Before speaking about this, we need to know the type of people the two arbiters were. Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari was a companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him) who came from Yemen. He stayed with the Muslim immigrants in Abyssinia until year 7, when he returned with them to join the Prophet. He was close to the Prophet and learned the Qur'an well. Indeed, he was one of the best reciters of the Qur'an and the eminent scholars among the Prophet's companions. The Prophet sent him as a judge to Yemen. His last appointment was that of governor of Kufa in southern Iraq. Some of Ali's supporters arrived in Kufa to raise support for Ali and to persuade its people to join his army in the Battle of the Camel first and then against the Syrians supporting Mu'awiyah. Abu Musa was keenly opposed to fighting between Muslims. He reminded the people of Kufa of what the Prophet had said

about internal strife, urging them to stay away from joining the fighting. Al-Ashtar, who was among the leaders of the rebellion against Uthman and subsequently joined Ali, left Abu Musa talking to the people in the mosque and occupied the government building in the city. When Abu Musa later arrived there, Al-Ashtar barred his entry and told him to leave. He relinquished his post and chose to live in a village called Urd, making sure not to be involved in any fighting. When people had enough bloodshed and realized that it would have been better for them to follow Abu Musa's advice, they nominated him as their representative in the arbitration, in recognition of his wise counsel.

Amr ibn Al-Aas, on the other hand, came to Islam late in the Prophet's life, but he joined the Prophet in Madinah before the conquest of Makkah. The Prophet sent him on missions to Al-Hasa and Oman, and valued his advice. During the time of Abu Bakr and Umar, he was one of the Muslim commanders who carried the message of Islam to other areas. His successes saw him liberating Palestine and Egypt from the Byzantine rule. Umar appointed him governor of Egypt and he stayed in that position well into Uthman's reign, but was subsequently replaced. When the trouble between Ali and Mu'awiyah started, he joined the latter, feeling that the rebellion against Uthman should be dealt with and his assassins should be brought to justice. The Prophet stated that he was solid in his faith. He needs no further testimony. While Amr was certainly very intelligent, Ibn Al-Arabi says that it suited his opponents to exaggerate this quality, giving it a strong element of cunning, while he was indeed God-fearing.

When the arbitration took place, it was a very serious affair between two very pious companions of the Prophet who were keen to achieve peace. They were also joined by a number of the Prophet's companions who wanted to see an end to all internal strife among Muslims. To suggest that the arbiters should agree to remove both Ali and Mu'awiyah from the top office is obviously wrong, because at the time, Mu'awiyah had made no claim to be the caliph. None of his supporters advocated that. The conflict was over a totally different issue, which was the need to establish justice with regard to Uthman's assassination. Indeed, the post of the caliph was not in question. Mu'awiyah did not make a claim to it until after Ali's death, and he was established as caliph when Al-Hasan ibn Ali pledged his loyalty to him.

The arbiters must have considered the situation as it had developed, realizing that the Muslim state was divided into two camps, and that there was need to re-establish unity. To do this, they thought that they needed to put the matter for further discussion by the Prophet's companions with whom he was pleased at the point of his death. The arbiters did not speak about removing their respective leaders, Ali and Mu'awiyah. This did not come into it at all. And why would they consider such an option which was likely to plunge the Muslim community into further trouble. Besides, no one suggested any mechanism for the purpose. The arbiters did not have the authority to make a suggestion to remove anyone from office, let alone suggest a method of running the Muslim state when such a step is taken.

What they rightly decided was that both Ali and Mu'awiyah would continue to hold the areas under their control for the time being, but the overall question of how to re-establish the unity of the Muslim state would be referred to the Prophet's companions. With such an agreement, there was no possibility of the trick people accuse Amr of playing against Abu Musa. Indeed, both were dedicated

companions of the Prophet and to play a trick in such a momentous matter would incur God's displeasure. Neither of them was of the type who would sacrifice their bond with God in order to serve their worldly ambition.

We mentioned last week Ibn Al-Arabi's refutation of the whole episode of Amr's trickery, which included a report by Hudayn ibn Al-Mundhir who questioned Amr on what he did with Abu Musa. It is useful to quote again the important part of that report. Amr told Al-Hudayn: "I asked Abu Musa what he thought about it, and he said that he preferred that it should be left to the Prophet's companions who enjoyed his pleasure before his death. I asked him what would be my and Mu'awiyah's positions, and he said: 'If you are asked to help, both of you could certainly contribute, and if your services are dispensed with, then long has been the time when neither of you was needed.'"

This is the sort of discussion between those two figures. Abu Musa told Amr that he would be very useful if his help was needed, but he could be sidelined if that was deemed better. For Amr to report this in such words is a sign of his honesty and magnanimity.

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The Noble Status of the Prophet's Companions

Adil Salahi

Arab News, 4/20/04

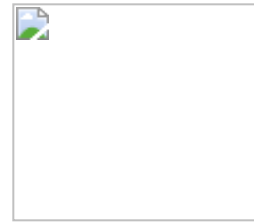
We mentioned last week the claims made by some Shiites alleging that the Prophet (peace be upon him) hinted, or even stated, that Ali was to be the caliph after him. We also mentioned a part of what Justice Ibn Al-Arabi had to say in refutation of such claims. He denies that the Prophet ever made such a hint, let alone a clear statement. He then proceeds to quote some Hadiths that show the standing of other companions of the Prophet. We continue with his refutation, adding some comments where these are needed. He says: The Prophet said: "Were I to choose someone as bosom friend, I would have chosen Abu Bakr. Rather, he is my brother and companion." (Related by Al-Bukahri).

Another Hadith quotes the Prophet as saying: "While asleep, I saw in my dream that I was standing by an open well and I drew out of it whatever water God willed. Then Abu Bakr took over and drew out of it one or two large buckets, but his drawing was rather weak, may God forgive him. Then the bucket became a very large leather container and Umar took it. I have never seen a dedicated person drawing water like Umar. The water was so plentiful that people made a resting place for their camels." (Related by Al-Bukhari).

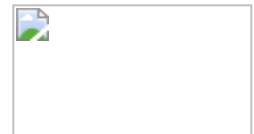
It is authentically reported that the Prophet, Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman went up Mount Uhud, and it quaked. The Prophet said to it: "Be firm, Uhud. You only have a Prophet, a believer upholding the truth, and two martyrs." (Related by Muslim).

The Prophet said: "In the generations before you, some people from among the children of Israel were spoken to from on high, without being prophets. Should there be in my followers any such person, he would be Umar." (Related by Al-Bukahri).

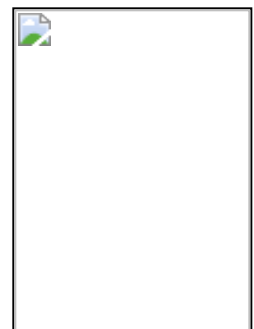
During his illness, the Prophet said to Aishah: "Call me Abu Bakr and your brother so that I dictate something. I fear that someone may aspire to a post and say, 'I have



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The Israeli apartheid (security) wall around Palestinian population centers (Ran Cohen, pmc, 5/24/03).



The Israeli apartheid (security) wall around Palestinian population centers in the West Bank, like a Python. (Alquds, 10/25/03).

attractions

a better claim.' But God and the believers will not agree to anyone other than Abu Bakr." (Related by Ahmad).

Ibn Abbas reports that a man came to the Prophet and told him about his dream, saying: "I saw in my dream tonight a cloud raining butter and honey, and I saw people stretching out their hand to gather it. Some took much and some took little. I also saw a line stretching from the heaven to the earth, and I saw you holding it and rising up. Then a man took it over and rose, and then another man held it and rose up. Then another man held it but it was cut, then it was tied up for him and he rose." Abu Bakr interpreted his dream, saying to the Prophet: "The line stretching between the heaven and the earth is the truth you are preaching. As you hold it, God elevates your status. A man takes it over after you and he rises with it, then another man holds on to it and rises with it. A third man takes it over and it is ruptured, but it is then repaired and he rises with it." (Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Ahmad).

Furthermore, it is authentically reported that "the Prophet once asked: 'Who of you had a dream?' A man said: 'I saw as if scales were lowered from heaven and you were weighed with Abu Bakr, but you were heavier. Then Abu Bakr was weighed with Umar and Abu Bakr was heavier. Then Umar was weighed with Uthman, and Umar was heavier. Then the scales were lifted up.' We could detect displeasure in the Prophet's face." (Related by Abu Dawood, Al-Tirmidhi and Ahmad).

All these Hadiths provide overwhelming evidence supporting the truth, if only people would consider them properly. In fact there is no need for anything to confirm Abu Bakr's position other than the verse that refers to his being with the Prophet when they were hiding in the cave while the idolaters were chasing them to kill them. It says: "If you do not help him (the Prophet); God will, (as He) supported him at the time when the unbelievers drove him away. He was only one of two. When these two were alone in the cave, he said to his companion: Do not grieve, for God is with us." (9: 40) Thus, God puts the entire Muslim community on one side and Abu Bakr on the other, making the two equal. All the Prophet's companions were solidly behind him.

When we consider these facts, we can clearly see the status of the caliphs, their commitment and line of order, individually and as a group. God says in the Qur'an: "God has promised those of you who believe and do good deeds that, of a certainty, He will cause them to accede to power on earth, in the same way as He caused those who lived before them to accede to it;



and that, of a certainty, He will firmly establish for them the religion which He has chosen for them; and that, of a certainty, He will cause their erstwhile state of fear to be replaced by a state of security. They will thus worship Me alone and associate with Me no partners whatsoever.” (24: 55) If this promise did not apply to those caliphs, to whom would it apply? If it was not true in their case, in whose case would it come true? What is universally and unanimously agreed by the Muslim community as a whole, up to the present day, is that none was superior to them in virtue and goodness. Those who came later were subject to disagreement, while in their case agreement is complete that they were the best leaders and that God’s promise was fulfilled for and through them, because they were the ones who upheld Islam and defended the Muslim community.

Justice Ibn Al-Arabi has more to say in refuting the allegations against the Prophet’s companions with regard to Ali’s position. He has more to say in defending the procedure that led to the appointment of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman as caliphs, before Ali could succeed to that position. We will look into this next week, God willing.

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Dispute Over The Prophet's Inheritance

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Justice Abu Bakr ibn Al-Arabi says: "When Uthman was assassinated, there was no one on the face of the earth more deserving of being caliph than Ali. Thus, the post was his at the right time and place. Through him, God explained a number of rules and questions which were not known to many. Umar had earlier said about Ali's knowledge: "Had it not been for Ali, Umar would have been doomed." His exceptional knowledge of Islam was most clearly demonstrated when he faced the trying prospect of fighting against fellow Muslims. He invited them for discussion, disputed their case and put to them his case, and he stopped short of initiating a fight. He then announced to his army: "We will not be the ones to start fighting. Should there be a battle, none should chase any of their soldiers who runs away. No injured fighter should be killed. No woman should be frightened, and we take no booty." He further ordered that they were acceptable as witnesses, and that prayer behind an imam from among them is valid. None of these rules was known at the time, because there was no precedent to suggest it. Hence scholars says: "Had it not been for those events, we would not have been aware of how to fight rebels against the Muslim state."

Those who press the claim of Ali being more entitled to succeed the Prophet (peace be upon him) also accuse their opponents of being unbelievers. Ibn Al-Arabi replies that it is the one who makes such a claim is an unbeliever. His argument is based on the Prophet's Hadith which states that when

a Muslim describes another as unbeliever, then this description is true of one of them. This means that if the accused was truly a Muslim, then the one who accuses him is an unbeliever.

Another claim concerns the Prophet's inheritance and the dispute which Al-Abbas and Ali referred to Umar, when Al-Abbas used some abusive words against Ali, his nephew, asking Umar to judge between them. The people present, all of whom were among the elite of the Prophet's companions, said to Umar: "Judge between them and settle the matter."

Addressing those companions, Umar said: "I appeal to you all by God who controls the heavens and earth: do you know that, referring to himself, the Prophet said: 'We do not leave any inheritance. What we leave behind is charity'? They answered: "He indeed said that." Turning to Al-Abbas and Ali, Umar said: "I appeal to you by God, do you know that the Prophet said that?" They answered in the affirmative. Umar then said: "With regard to the booty gained without fighting, God has given His Messenger something special that He has not given to anyone else. The Prophet handled this during his lifetime in a certain way. After he passed away, Abu Bakr said, 'I am responsible for what belonged to the Prophet.' For his reign of two years, he handled that in the same way as the Prophet did. The two of you might think that Abu Bakr was not up to it, when God knows that he was true, faithful to his trust, honest, wise and he acted only on the basis of what is right..."

Continuing his discussion, Justice Ibn Al-Arabi says: "The abusive words used by Al-Abbas against Ali, his nephew, should be taken in the same way as something a father says to his son. If these express an opinion, this is acceptable. They are easily overlooked by the offended party in order to gain God's words. When such words are said by an elder person to a younger one, let alone by a father to a son, they are easily forgiven and forgotten. As for Umar saying that both of them thought Abu Bakr was unjust in the way he handled the matter, this is merely a question of difference of views on a particular matter, with each party taking a view contrary to that of the other. Abu Bakr and Umar ruled on it according to their view, while Al-Abbas and Ali thought differently. However, when they referred the matter for judgment, they accepted the ruling made in the same way as a disputant submits to the ruling of a judge. When the ruling went against them, Al-Abbas and Ali accepted the ruling even though they might have thought it was wrong.

It may be argued that this could be acceptable at the beginning when the ruling was made on the basis of discretion. However, Al-Abbas and Ali might have thought that a report by one person could not be taken up in preference to what is stated in the Qur'an and the well-known principle applicable to all, until the matter has been thoroughly considered. This refers to the Qur'anic ruling on how to divide a person's inheritance among his heirs. Hence, when thorough consideration was made, both Al-Abbas and Ali accepted the final judgment as detailed in the authentic Hadith we quoted.

Having said that, we should also add that it may be correctly said that there is no definitive statement on the matter. The Prophet's statement, "We do not leave any inheritance. What we leave behind is charity," could be interpreted in different ways, such as: "It is not right that we should be inherited. I am not one to leave any inheritance, because I do not have any property in this world that might be transferred from me to someone else." Another possible reading of the Prophet's statement makes each of its two sentences a separate ruling. Thus, the first sentence establishes a

ruling: “No inheritance is passed from me to anyone whomsoever.” The second sentence would then be a statement making clear that the Prophet put into effect God’s order that whatever booty he had without a fight should go to charity. It was made his by God’s ruling, applicable to anything gained without a fight. Should something of this be left in his hand at the point of his death, it should go to charity.

We should differentiate here between what the Prophet received of booty gained without a fight and his share of booty gained after a battle. Of the latter type the Prophet, as the ruler of the Islamic state, receives a share of one-fifth of the booty, so that he ensures that it goes to those who are deserving, as stated in the Qur’anic verse: “Know that one-fifth of whatever booty you may acquire in war is for God and the Messenger, and for the near of kin, the orphans, the needy and the traveler in need.” (8: 41)

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Allegations Against Mu'awiyah

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Adil Salahi, Arab News

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Justice Ibn Al-Arabi tackles some of the accusations that have been circulated over a long period of time about Mu'awiyah and his rule. The first of these is the allegation that Mu'awiyah masterminded a plot against Al-Hasan and killed him by poisoning. Ibn Al-Arabi says that this is totally false, for two reasons: the first is that he did not fear anything from Al-Hasan, because the latter relinquished all claims to be the caliph and pledged his loyalty to Mu'awiyah.

Secondly, if it were true, it was done secretly, and no one other than God knows the truth about it. How could such people confirm its being true and done by a particular person at a time long removed from their own time. Moreover, it was a period when no reporter could be trusted without corroboration. There were too many people with vested interests, and there was much chaos. Often people attributed to others what could not be true. Hence, nothing could be accepted unless it can be verified and corroborated on good authority.

On this point Al-Khatib quotes Ibn Taymiyah's refutation of the allegation of poisoning Al-Hasan: "This has not been confirmed by any admissible evidence or voluntary confession, or by an authoritative report. It is something that cannot be known for certain. Hence, to maintain it is to maintain something that has not been corroborated." Al-Khatib adds: "In our present times we have

often heard of people, Turks and others, who are said to have died by deliberate poisoning. People differ on this even within the same place or the same prison where the death occurs, with some people saying one thing and others saying a different thing.” Ibn Taymiyah adds that Al-Hasan died in Madinah, while Mu’awiyah was in Damascus.

Next Justice Ibn Al-Arabi mentions the objections raised against Mu’awiyah’s choice of his son, Yazeed, to be his successor as caliph, when he was not competent. Al-Khatib discusses this, saying: “If competence means that the chosen successor should attain the standard of Abu Bakr and Umar, combining their virtues, we say that no caliph in Islamic history attained such a standard, not even Umar ibn Abd Al-Aziz. But even if we hope for the best and say that such a competent person is chosen, we maintain that he would not benefit by the same environment which existed during their time. On the other hand, if competence means being of good conduct, keen to implement Islamic law, administer justice, serve the community’s interests and fight its enemies, opening horizons for its faith and being kindly to all individuals and groups, then verification and authentication of the reports about Yazeed’s policies and conduct will prove that he was not less than many rulers on whom history heaps much praise.

There are numerous reports on how Mu’awiyah managed to confirm his son as his successor in the face of opposition by senior figures in the Muslim community, including Al-Husain, the grandson of the Prophet (peace be upon him), Abdullah ibn Umar, Abdullah ibn Al-Zubayr and Ibn Abbas. Many provide details that cannot stand to casual, let alone careful examination. Ibn Al-Arabi mentions several of these before condemning them as sheer fabrication. These reports contradict each other in many significant details and attribute to some of the Prophet’s companions what could not be their conduct or their statements. We will overlook these and move to stating Ibn Al-Arabi’s view about Yazeed’s appointment as successor to Mu’awiyah. He says:

“Mu’awiyah did not take up the better choice of leaving the matter of his succession to be settled through consultation, without nominating anyone from his own relatives, let alone his son. Instead he nominated his son and people pledged their loyalty to him, except those who chose not to follow suit. Thus, his appointment became valid because the pledge of loyalty becomes valid even when given by one person, or by two people as some scholars say.

“If it is said that he should have chosen someone who meets the conditions necessary for a person holding the position of ruler, we say that age is not one of these conditions. Moreover, it is not confirmed that Yazeed was too young for the post.

“To the suggestion that justice and knowledge are two of its conditions which were not met by Yazeed, we reply: ‘How do we know that he was neither just nor a man of knowledge? Had he been deprived of these two qualities, the three personalities who advised Mu’awiyah not to go ahead with his plans for Yazeed’s appointment would have mentioned that. However, they preferred to argue against it as an act of imposition. They wanted the choice to be made through consultation.’”

Al-Khatib discusses Yazeed’s appointment. He says that among the Quraysh people there were many of Yazeed’s generation who considered themselves possible candidates for the post of caliph. Even Saeed ibn Uthman ibn Affan and others of even lesser standing might have aspired to that.

There is no doubt that the choice of caliph through consultation is much better than nominating someone as a 'crown prince'. Mu'awiyah might have thought that opting for consultation, without nominating a successor, might have led to much division which could erupt into battles that could have affected the entire Muslim community. Mu'awiyah was fully aware that the qualities required for a Caliph were shared out between many such young aspirants, with some having qualities that others did not have. Yazeed, who had some of these qualities, had the advantage of being supported by the military power. Besides, he had wide tribal support.

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Amr Ibn Al-Aas: How Stubborn Resistance Collapsed

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Adil Salahi, Arab News

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Amr ibn Al-Aas was a shrewd, highly intelligent man who belonged to the nobility of the Quraysh. He was determinedly hostile to Islam. In fact he was the Quraysh's envoy to Negus seeking the extradition of the early Muslims who migrated to Abyssinia. He fought with the Quraysh against Islam in several battles. Little did he know then that he would come to be one of the great commanders fighting for the Islamic cause. His account of his conversion to Islam makes highly interesting reading. He says:

"I was strongly hostile to Islam. I took part in the Battles of Badr, Uhud and the Moat, fighting alongside the idolaters, and I was able to survive. Now I started thinking that Muhammad would eventually triumph over the Quraysh. I, therefore, went to my place at Al-Ruht where I lived in semiseclusion. I was still very hostile to Islam and I felt that even if every man in the Quraysh would embrace Islam, I would not.

I went to Makkah, where I spoke to a group of my people who valued my opinion and consulted me on every serious matter. I told them that I thought Muhammad was on the crest of a wave. He was bound to overcome whoever resisted him. I then explained that I felt it was wiser to seek refuge in

Abyssinia, where we could join Negus. If Muhammad did overcome his enemies, we would be safe with Negus. If the Quraysh turned out to be the winners, they would know that we were on their side. They all agreed with me and we started preparing for our departure. I suggested to them to put together a valuable gift which Negus would like. The gift he liked best from our part of the world was hide. We, therefore, took with us a large quantity of hide and traveled until we reached Abyssinia.

When we were in the court of Negus, Amr ibn Umayyah Al-Damri, the envoy sent by Muhammad, arrived with a message. When I saw Amr ibn Umayyah go in for his audience with Negus and leave soon afterward, I said to my people: "This is Amr ibn Umayyah. If I can persuade Negus to give him up to me, I will kill him to give the Quraysh infinite pleasure."

When I was admitted into the presence of Negus, I prostrated myself to him as I used to do. He said to me: "Welcome, my friend. Have you brought me any gifts from your part of the world?"

I said: "Yes, I have brought you a gift of hide."

I presented my gift and he was very pleased with it. He gave some of it to his bishops and patriarchs and ordered that the rest be kept and recorded. When I saw that he was very pleased with my gift, I said to him: "Your Majesty, I have seen a man come out of your court. He is the envoy of our enemy, who has killed a number of our chiefs and noblemen. May I request that you give him up to me so that I can kill him?"

He was very angry with me for what I said. He hit me with his hand on my nose and I felt as if my nose was broken. I was bleeding heavily through the nose and tried to wipe the blood with my clothes. I was so humiliated that I wished the earth would open up and swallow me because I was so afraid of him. I then said to him: "Your Majesty, had I known that you would dislike what I said I would not have made that request."

He felt a little ashamed and said to me: "Amr, you are asking me to give up to you the envoy of a man who receives the archangel who used to come to Moses and Jesus so that you can kill him?"

When I heard his words, I felt a great change overcoming me. I thought that Negus, the Arabs and the non-Arabs, recognized the truth while I was deliberately turning away from it. I said to him: "Do you testify to that, Your Majesty?"

He said: "Yes, I bear witness to that in front of God. Amr, do as I say and follow him, for his cause is that of the truth, and he will win over all those who oppose him, in the same way as Moses won against Pharaoh and his soldiers."

I said to Negus: "Do you accept on his behalf my pledge to follow Islam?"

He answered in the affirmative and put out his hands and I gave him my pledge to be a Muslim.

He then called for a bowl of water to be brought for me to wash. He also gave me new clothes, because my own clothes were full of blood. When I went out, my friends were very pleased to see me wearing new clothes given me by Negus. They asked me whether he had granted my request, and I said that I did not feel the occasion was suitable for such a request, since I was speaking to him for the first time. They agreed with me and I pretended that I was going out for some private purpose and left them there. I went straight to the port area, where I found a ship ready to sail. I went on board and sailed to a place called Al-Shu'bah, where I disembarked. I bought a camel and traveled on toward Madinah. I passed through Marr Al-Zahrān and went on until I arrived at Al-Haddah. I saw two men who had arrived there a short while earlier, trying to find a place to encamp. One of them was inside the tent; the other was holding the reins of their two camels. Presently, I recognized Khalid ibn Al-Waleed. When I asked him where he was going, he answered: "To Muhammad. All people of any significance have become Muslims. If we were to remain non-Muslim, he would catch us by the neck in the same way as the hyena is caught in its cave."

I told him that I also was going to Muhammad and wanted to be a Muslim. Uthman ibn Talhah came out of the tent and welcomed me. We stayed there together that night.

We traveled on together until we arrived at Madinah. I will never forget a man saying as we drew near: Ya Rabah, "What a profitable morning!" He repeated that three times. We were very pleased when we heard him say that. As he looked at us, he said: "Makkah has given up the reign after these two have come to join us." I thought he was referring to me and Khalid ibn Al-Waleed. He went quickly toward the mosque. I thought that he went to give the Prophet (peace be upon him) the news of our arrival. I was proved right.

We stopped for a short while at the old volcanic area outside Madinah, where we put on our best clothes. When the midafternoon prayer, Asr, was called for, we went on until we arrived at the mosque to meet the Prophet. His face was beaming with pleasure and all the Muslims were pleased when they learned that we had adopted Islam.

Khalid ibn Al-Waleed went first to give his pledge of loyalty to the Prophet. He was followed by Uthman ibn Talhah. I was third. When I sat down opposite him I could not lift my face up to him because I was feeling very shy. I gave him my pledge of loyalty, provided that God would forgive me all my sins which I had committed in the past. I did not remember to include what I might do in future. The Prophet said to me: "When you embrace Islam, all your past sins are forgiven. When you emigrate for the cause of God, your emigration ensures also the forgiveness of your past sins."

After we embraced Islam, the Prophet placed me and Khalid ibn Al-Waleed at the top of his advisers in any serious matter confronting him. We enjoyed the same positions with Abu Bakr. I continued to enjoy that position during the reign of Umar, but Umar had perhaps some reservations with respect to Khalid."

This is the account of one of the great servants of Islam who was later to command Muslim armies which liberated both Palestine and Egypt. He also ruled over Egypt for a long time.